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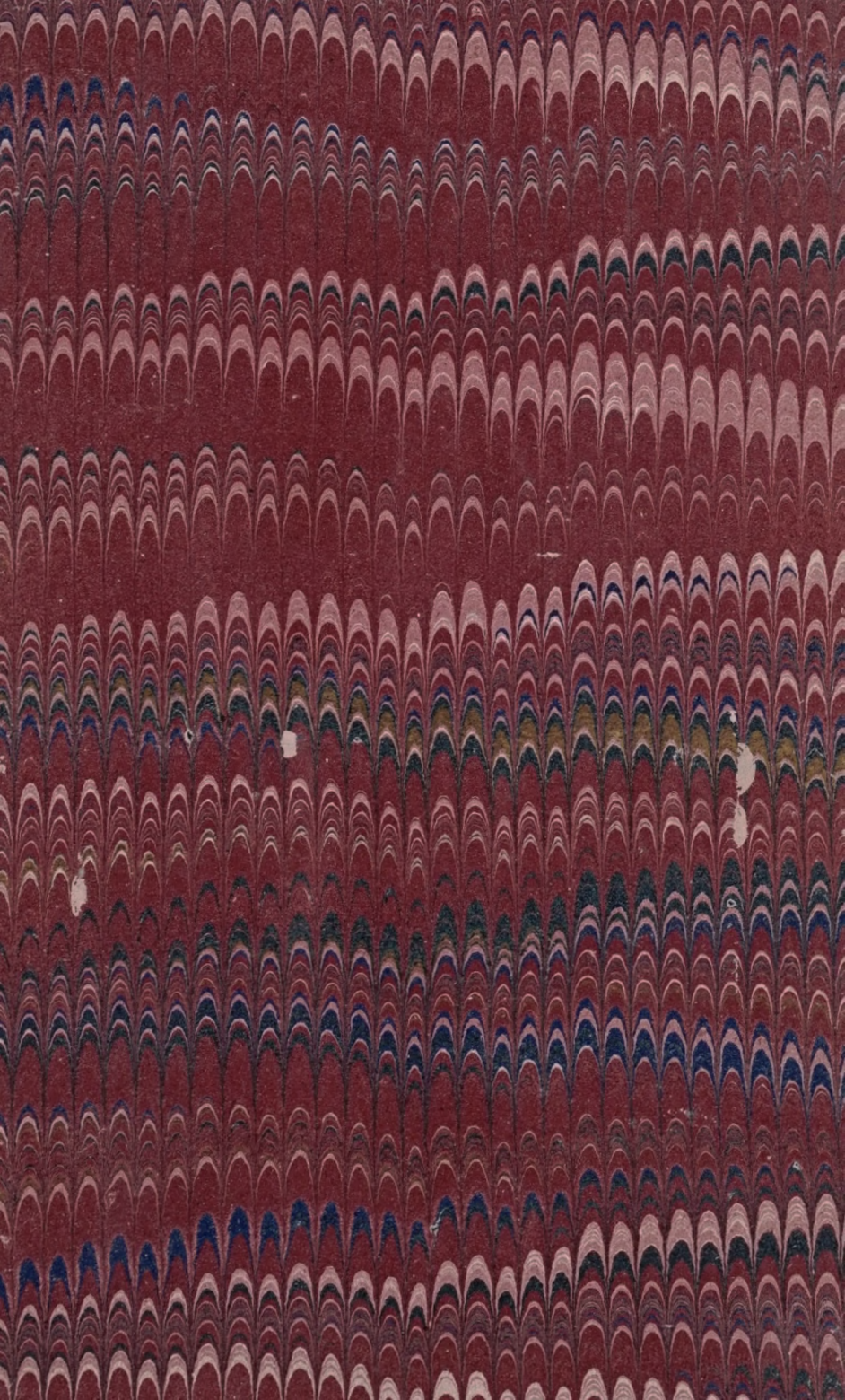
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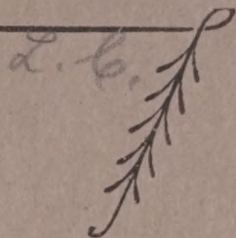
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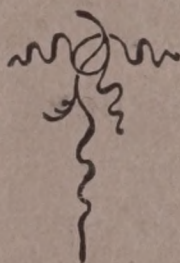


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BY

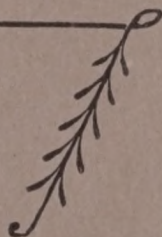
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AUTHOR OF "CLOVERLY," "THE OTHER HOUSE," ETC.



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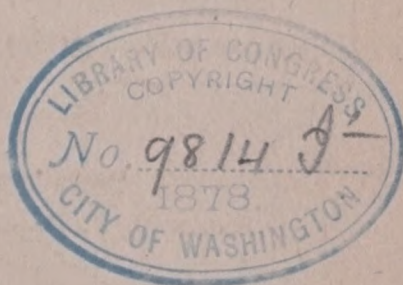
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AGATHA LEE'S INHERITANCE.

CHAPTER I.

“AGATHA! Agatha!”

I stopped to listen, just holding the door in my hand, but with no thought of obediently answering the summons.

“Agatha! Agatha!”

It was Aunt Martha's voice plainly. I closed the door very softly, and once out on the lawn sped away fast as possible to a little nook among the trees, under a high bank, dark, thick and cool, with shadows and swaying, singing branches. This was the spot above all others that I loved to call “home.” There was nothing in or out of the house I cared for. We lived a little way from the great, noisy city, whose roar and turmoil surged around, but never quite reached us. The

house was beautiful, quiet, and orderly; far too orderly to suit me. I would have given worlds to but romp around it as I pleased, and verily believe I could have smashed my long-suffering aunt's one solitary mirror, and her slender display of *bijouterie* as well, for the mere pleasure of forcing things out of their unnatural calm. The carpet seemed altogether too fine for my rough feet to tread upon, and the painful air of propriety about the whole place absolutely stifled me. Only when I was out under the trees, in my favorite hiding-place, with not even the sun to reach me—alone—while I fancied I was thinking—instead of which I was wantonly idling—only here did I call it "Home." So I lay down upon the short grass, soft and smooth as velvet to the touch, and resting my head upon the trunk of an old gnarled tree, I shut my eyes and sailed away into dream-land, while the drowsy wind just murmured a lullaby, soft and tender enough to wrap me into the most delicious rest. I could not frame my thoughts. I only knew I was very happy when I was out there alone, and very much cast down when I was in the house with Aunt Martha, and I longed with an eagerness I hardly dared acknowledge to myself, for the time to come when I could

put the present life away and be my own mistress. I could hardly wait for the years to come and go and make me in their flight a woman. One castle I was forever building, and Phil, the rude fellow, was forever demolishing. A far-away, shadowy dream it was to me, but sometimes my fancy built it very clearly. Somebody was going to die and leave me a home. "If somebody were only kind, they would die now," I said poutingly to Phil one day.

"Oh, Aggie, for shame!" Phil made answer, opening his round, brown eyes, and giving me such a reproving glance, for he wouldn't have spoken a harsh word to me for the world—dear boy!

Now Phil was my playmate, my counselor, my friend above all friends; Phil was my cousin, and we were both orphans and wards of Aunt Martha's. She was never unkind to us. She was always the same unvarying, monotonous, placid Aunt Martha. Duty and propriety divided her so completely that there was nothing at all of her beyond those two principles. She was rigid in her orthodoxy, and she was a "model of deportment." And Phil and I didn't care and didn't know anything about either. Phil was older than I. I was ten, he

twelve, but I knew far more than he, I thought, so I ordered him about as I pleased, and led him something of a dog's life, capriciously caring for him one instant, and casting him off the next. That very day had he wickedly put out my dollie's eyes, and then gone off to the city, riding on his little shag pony, as placidly as if he had never perpetrated such cruelty. "I would never speak to Phil again!" I said bitterly, and not caring to see any one, least of all Aunt Martha. I would not listen to her call, but came out in the old place to dream. I forgot all about dollie's eyes when I had settled myself in my favorite nook. It was so quiet and solemn, with the sun shining all around so brightly, so still, so clear, and not a ray of light to pierce through and reach me. And the birds twittering about from limb to limb, the bees humming, the leaves softly stirring, and the sky so blue and without a cloud overhead. Yes, it was soothing and lovely to even my child heart, and I shut my eyes and dreamed my dream and I built up my castle very high and fair that day, and forgot all about Phil's misconduct, and planned a great many charming impossibilities for us both, when, as he used often to say, "our ship comes from over the sea." Was it really a ship, and

would it ever spread white sails, and come home laden to me? Phil said it would, but Phil said a vast deal of nonsense, and was never to be depended upon, that I knew.

Somebody came walking soberly down the garden walk, crossing the lawn and coming toward me. Somebody was Jane, my aunt's maid, and "somebody" always knew where to find me. I shut my eyes, feigning sleep. I didn't like Jane very much more than I did Aunt Martha. She was Aunt Martha's echo, shadow, counterpart, only on an humbler scale. She was propriety itself, and she had considered me, that I well knew, a very wicked child. I lay there peering at her between my half-closed eyes, breathing very heavily, in utter unconsciousness that she detected the fraud instantly.

"Miss," she said severely, putting aside the branches, "you are wanted in the house directly."

I breathed quite regularly, trying to keep my eyelids from trembling.

"Wicked, deceitful child," she went on, "to try me in this way, and put your poor, dear aunt all of a tremble on your account. She has been calling you everywhere, and Dr. Milnor has been with her above an hour, waiting to see you. Wake up, you wicked child!"

“Dr. Milnor?” and I jumped up instantly. “Why didn’t you tell me at once, Jane?”

And I ran past her, never heeding her prayers that I would stop and put on a clean pinafore and smooth my disordered hair and wash my soiled face and hands. Dr. Milnor very seldom came to the cottage. He was an old man and quite feeble I knew. Long ago he had given up his church and duties to a younger and not nearly (I thought) as pleasant a man.

But he clung to his people yet, and the dear, old hills of home, and his only wish was to die among those who for so many years had been like his children to him. Once, by my mother’s sick-bed, yes, by her death-bed, I, a fearful wondering child, had received the old man’s benediction that had seemed to enter into my heart, child though I was, and in a manner sanctified all my future life to me. Yet I knew nothing of my own great needs, or the longing wants of an unregenerate soul. I only knew that I was once blessed—blessed solemnly and tenderly in the name of the great All Father and the dear Son, who once took such little, ignorant children in His arms, suffering them to come unto Him. My heart opened and took in the *blessing*. I think I was never very

bad without the touch of the old man's hand coming back to me suddenly. Sometimes I felt it as a reproach—sometimes a warning—always a restraint. Sometimes I checked the hasty words, feeling almost as if back again in the dim room with the yearning white face of my mother, looking into mine as she gave up her only child to God. This was the way I remembered and loved Dr. Milnor. What did I care for soiled frock or hands? I left Jane far, very far, behind me, and bursting open the little parlor door, and never once noticing Aunt Martha's shocked face or warning finger, I threw myself into his arms and held up my mouth for him to kiss. Such a mouth! There were traces of jelly, surreptitiously taken from the store-room in an auspicious moment, and there were still more recent traces of dirt and tears lingering there, for had not one of my hapless children lost her eyesight that day, and had I not lifted up my voice and wept? But I forgot it all, and the good, kind Doctor never thought of it either as he stooped to take the little, dirty face in his two hands and lifting it up, kissed forehead and lips, saying very tenderly, "God love the child and keep her always." I clung to him delightedly, though my aunt tried vainly by little

Freemasonry signs, well understood by me, to beguile me into going to the nursery and Jane, for a change of attire. But no, obstinacy was an inherent part of my nature. By Dr. Milnor's side I dropped, feeling the kind hands once more upon my head, and going back instantly in thought to the dim room, by my mother's bedside. I did not care to talk. The sight of the placid face with the silver hair falling around it, and the touch of the gentle hand was only another blessing to me. I listened as he talked to Aunt Martha of the great good that I might yet do in the world—of the proper training I should require—of the great future so wrapped in cloud, but which was surely waiting for me. Why for me? Why should he seem so earnest and grave, and why, when he looked down at me, were the kind blue eyes dim with tears? I listened in wonder, never saying a word, but nestling closer to his side and feeling a sense of vague alarm.

Aunt Martha spoke to me first.

“Agatha,” she said, measuring every word after her usual, composed, prim fashion, “Dr. Milnor is the bearer of very important news to you. Mr. Hilton is dead.”

A long pause. I had not the faintest idea who

Mr. Hilton was, and breathed a great sigh of relief. Very clearly it was neither Phil nor the dogs nor one of my long array of waxen children who had come to grief. So I said very briskly, and with much relish, "Yes, Aunt Martha, I don't know Mr. Hilton, so I don't care, you know."

"But you must care," she said. "It is a great deal to you; Mr. Hilton was very rich. He had no one to leave his money to."

"But a little child," interrupted Dr. Milnor softly, "who God grant may live to His honor and glory, and make good use of the wealth He has given her. Will she try?" stooping down to kiss my forehead again. "Will she remember it is God who has given her this goodly heritage? Will she always ask Him to help her spend it wisely and in His service?"

I was too young to realize all the enormous benefits and advantages thus suddenly thrown upon me. I only knew my castle stood out firm and clear as I had built it that day. "You shall have beautiful new eyes, dollie, my love," I whispered to the mutilated image closely wrapped in my arms, as I lay upon my little, white bed that night. "You shall have beautiful new eyes every day in the year if you like, my pet. We will not care for

Phil, he is so cruel and bad a boy. We will live for ourselves hereafter, you and I—Jane,” I said, calling her to me, “is it a very fine thing to be rich?”

“Very fine, Miss,” with a little more softness in her tone than she usually employed in addressing me.

“Will I ride in a carriage and have new dollies whenever I please, and ever and ever so much candy when I like to buy it?”

“You will, Miss, but wouldn’t it be better to say your prayers and go to sleep just now? You haven’t thanked God for His goodness to you to-day.”

“But I have thanked Mr. Hilton,” I said practically, “and that is far better, I think, Jane,” not noticing her shocked look, “and now if you please you may put the light out, and dollie and I will go to sleep.”

Dear Dr. Milnor! How little I thought of his solemn words—how meager the thanks my child heart gave to the great Giver of all this bounty. Very clearly it was Mr. Hilton who had done it all, and my gratitude went to him. An inheritance! God alone knew if it would bring me good or ill; but my careless visions were darkened

by no shadows that night. An inheritance! I clasped dollie closer in my arms as I fell asleep, whispering to her comforting words, and promising her eyes of every color she desired—beautiful eyes every day in the year if she liked.

This is the way the castle I had builded shaped itself solidly in the future for me. This is the way the Esperanza spread her white sails and came floating over the waves to little Agatha Lee—child— orphan—but after that night—mistress of Hilton Lee.

CHAPTER II.

A LONG, rocky line of coast—a strip of smooth, shining sand at its base, over which, far as the eye could reach, the boiling surf crept and curled. A great arch of blue sky overhead, and a great arch of blue water below; and spreading sails like white-winged birds, forever coming and going—ah! what a spot for dreams! To run to the rocky headland—to find a place where I might descend, from point to point, and reach the sands below—to sit in the warm sunlight and feel the fresh air upon my cheek, and wonder how far the winds and waves had come that day—to hear the dirge-like burden of the waters—the great ocean chant—the weird, wonderful whisperings that crept up to me from the sea, and which charmed me into listening and dreaming away part of that first summer down on the sands at Hilton Lee. Many and many a day alone—for Phil only stayed through the first four weeks of his vacation, and then went

away with some school chum to finish the remainder. The remembrance of those days, lonely for a child—and never entirely lonely either, because of the whispering voices around me, so dream-like, misty, and far away—yet in a manner stay by me still. Every wave, as it broke, had a voice for my ear. Sometimes a wail, a longing, a regret—sometimes a glad whispering of the shores it had washed—of the strange, wild countries it had seen; of the famous cities, frowning towers, and ruined castles it hurried past; or, leaping fearfully and high, it spoke of sudden storm and wreck, and despair and death. And then I fled away, frightened and trembling, trying to deafen my ears to the long, sullen booming of the angry breakers as they moaned and tossed upon the bar.

The house was far away, back from the rocky headland, sheltered from the storm and wind, bosomed in by tall, old trees. A long sloping lawn led to the road. A high stone wall divided it from our neighbors, although, truth to tell, we knew nothing of them, or indeed if there were people living there at all. We had only come down to the Lee—Aunt Martha, Jane, Phil, and I—for the summer months, and to see, as my good aunt prudently suggested, “into the state of affairs.”

Jane found out for us, in the surreptitious way of servants generally, that our nearest neighbors were the Endicotts—beyond that we knew nothing—we saw no one. Phil stayed with us his allotted four weeks, and together we explored every part of the farm and shore, and knew it all by heart.

I was three years older than when I received my great, new gift, through the hands of Dr. Milnor. I had given my dollie the beautiful new eyes for which I had been sighing, and then wearying of the multitude of cares these waxen children brought with them, I had put them aside and taken up other longings and pursuits. And Dr. Milnor had gone peacefully to rest, leaving a great void in my life—how great I had not begun to realize until he had gone away from me forever. I was such a child when my mother died, and the dear old Doctor was the only link left between us, between me and heaven—between me and the great hereafter, which came so solemnly before me when I felt no longer the touch of the hand which had once conveyed blessings with it.

Phil no longer practiced cruelties on my children or teased and bullied me. I was thirteen years old, and mistress of Hilton Lee! In that month he was with us we had not a single quarrel

or difference of any kind. From morning until night we wandered about together; oftenest out on the sands, his arm about me as we walked up and down, planning great things for the future, and sending out our tiny fleets of childish longings—to sail serenely into port some day, or to wreck as many a noble ship has been wrecked—who could tell?

The day Phil left us I felt my loneliness more than ever before in my life. I slipped from the house and Aunt Martha, nodding complacently over her embroidery in an easy-chair, and wandered off alone by myself. It was a relief to me to be out of the house and feel the fresh breeze blowing around me, as I took our old path to the beach. I clambered over the rocks until I reached the sands below, where Phil and I had wandered every day, and finding out the big flat rock where we had sat and talked in the moonlight the night before, I seated myself upon it and looked around. A boat lay on the sands, drawn up high out of reach of the creeping waves, but nobody was in sight; lonely, still, and white, the beach lay like a long shining path of silver, and the ocean, rocking placidly, lulled me into profoundest dreams. It was warm July weather, and one of the loveliest

days of that sweet midsummer time. But I could not thoroughly enjoy this loveliness just then. There was enough of loneliness and yearning want in my heart to make even the sun shine less brightly for a season. The tide was coming in, but the waters were quite glassy and smooth beyond the bar, and a golden gossamer haze hung over sea and sky, melting it all in one great illimitable blue. On the smooth sands the white surf seethed and gurgled, creeping up nearer and nearer my resting-place, until it seemed to me the water was trying to reach my feet. I threw off my slippers and put my foot down to meet the coming wave. I loved to feel the soft, cool water rippling around me. But I was lonely. The day before, Phil and I had run up and down the beach, frolicking and dashing in the spray, and with never a thought of anything but pleasure. Now I was alone. It would be six long months before I should see my old playfellow again, and another year, probably, before we should "come unto these yellow sands." A year. A great deal could befall me of good or ill in that time. Was I always to be alone, this way? My eyes wandered over the waters—a vast, misty, wonderful circle—and only this little point of land on which I stood

seemed stable and real. Over beyond all this blue I knew lay great, busy worlds—above me, wheeling into space, still other worlds were hovering. I felt like an atom—a grain of sand on the shore of this far-reaching sea. “It is like eternity,” I said to myself, my eyes filling. “It is like eternity to stand here alone and think of what lies beyond and around me. And I am alone in it all—I shall be alone all my life, as now.” And my eyes, brimming and running over, blotted out sea and sky with fast-falling tears. I thought it all over once more—the life I had planned for Agatha Lee—the ships I had freighted and sent out sailing over the seas—the hopes, the fears, the longings—but they were all of this world. Nothing did the waves ever whisper to me of the life beyond this—or if it whispered, I did not listen. It was all of life here that I dreamed, not the unending life hereafter. When Phil had done with school and college and gone out into the world, a man—when Aunt Martha should grow old and feeble, and finally die, like Dr. Milnor, who, who on the great, broad earth, would care for me?—what good would my inheritance do me if I were alone; alone in the future as now? It was a great thought for a child to grapple. It was a lonely song the sea was

singing. I covered my face with my hands and burst into an uncontrollable fit of crying. When once fairly roused I could not stay the torrent of tears. It seemed to me for a moment that I forgot my youth and looked my life resolutely in the face, feeling how like, how very like it was, to one of those atoms of shifting sand under my feet. I slipped from my seat, and throwing both arms around the damp rock, I leaned my head down upon it and sobbed aloud. There was no one near to inquire into my grief, or to soothe it either, and I indulged in the unrestrained luxury with never a thought of any one hearing or heeding me. How long I lay there I could not tell. I felt quite worn out and exhausted and was only sobbing softly to myself when I was roused by hearing a voice, apparently close by my side. The low, quiet tones seemed to come up to me out of the sea and blending singularly with the music of the waves, scarcely startled me, it seemed so impossible it should be any living person. Nevertheless, the voice said very plainly, "My little maiden, what is the matter?" And I sprang to my feet, brushing away the tears, and instantly aware the voice was no trick of my fancy, or song of the sea. A tall, beardless youth stood before me, looking down

with surprise, and kindly scrutiny as well, in his blue eyes. The voice and the face were instantly reassuring, but I shrank instinctively from the thought of a stranger seeing me thus and in tears.

"My little maiden," the voice was saying, "sitting like Dorothea by the water's side and uttering saddest complaints—do not cry any more—let me turn comforter and wipe all these tears away."

I said nothing. I could not be frightened when I looked into the blue eyes and heard the kindly voice, but I could utter no word, and only covered my face with my hands. Then he sat down on the rock and tried to take them away and look into my eyes, but I hung my head so that he could not see them at all.

"Don't cry any more," he whispered softly. "You are too much of a child to be troubled with any grief as yet deeper than the loss of a toy. I never could abide tears. Tell me—what can I say to comfort you? Speak, Dorothea!"

I had never in all my life heard of "Miguel De Cervantes Saavedra," and as I sprang to my feet, I explained my name was Agatha Lee, and not *Dorothea*, at all.

"Oh! then," said the stranger, lifting his eyebrows with an air of mock surprise, "but I am

more than ever lost in amazement. I looked around the rock for Sancho, and the knight and priest, and came down hither to offer to mount you on the famous mule and give you 'bon voyage' toward your kingdom of Micomacón."

Clearly a crazy man! And yet the tone was full of jesting laughter, and the eyes kindly and serene in spite of a sparkle of mischief resting there; but clearly he was crazy—and I alone with him on the beach; only a moment before, his hands in mine—and Aunt Martha, dozing placidly over her tapestries in the little summer parlor, with no thought of where or with whom I was tarrying! I gave one bound and sprang from his side and in an instant was clambering up the rocks. He could not have followed me if he had wished, for fear added wings to my speed, and I knew the exact spot to place every footstep. I made no pause to look back until I gained the flat ledge of rock hanging over the sands—the top of the terrace, beyond which lay the smooth grass and meadows of home. Then I looked back and saw I was not pursued. My unknown friend had reached the little boat and was pushing away. But as he saw me he rose in the stern and took off his hat, waving it gracefully. The wind tossed his

yellow hair about his face—the sunlight glittered upon it in light and shade—and then, rising and falling with the slow, majestic sweep of each incoming wave, the little boat shot through the foam and out to sea. I dropped upon the grass, watching the tiny bark with eager eyes. How gracefully it rose and fell! How strong the arm which steered it clear through the smooth blue, and then, without any apparent effort, mounted the crest of the wave, toppling down over it—shooting over and through it and on to another. “He was used to the sea,” I said to myself. None but the fishermen about here, on the beach, whom I had watched going out day by day with their nets and lines, could manage a boat like that. Who was he? and where had he come from?—“out of the depths,” as he had appeared? I watched the boat until it became only a black speck—a point. I saw it rounding to and nearing a little yacht which lay with furled sails, rocking idly upon the curling sea. And then, as I still sat watching for the speck which I had lost, and which apparently the sea had swallowed up, I saw the canvas flutter, then, spreading its wings like a white sea-gull, it disappeared in the mists of sea and sky. He had vanished as suddenly and mysteriously as he had come.

CHAPTER III.

"My dear Agatha," said Aunt Martha, sleepily, as I came in the house an hour afterward, "where have you been all this long time? I have finished the bud I was doing, and had, I am positively certain, an undue amount of sleep. I woke twice and asked Jane for you, but she knew no better than I where to go."

"I have been on the beach, aunt," I said quietly, taking a stool at her feet.

"And not bathing?" she leaned forward and touched my dress, which was quite dry. "That is right. We know nothing of the tides, and unless Phil or some proper person were with you, it would be extremely dangerous. I think I don't quite approve of your wandering off so much alone by yourself. I really wish I were able to go with you, sometimes, but the sea air has a most surprising effect upon me. It is impossible to keep this drowsiness away. But I can soon go with you, I hope."

"By no means," I said quickly, resolving not to tell her of my rencontre that day. "The beach is perfectly quiet and safe, and, indeed, you would be tired out if you were to take one of my long tramps."

Aunt Martha loved her ease. She settled herself back again upon her cushions placidly. "I think you had better take one of the dogs, then. I am sure it is hardly right to wander away so. I feel very anxious sometimes," sorting out the right shade of red, with no sign of care on her smooth brow, and proceeding to the study of the rose again.

I suppose this placidity of Aunt Martha's was the very thing which annoyed me more than all else she ever did. It acted upon me as an irritant, I was such a positive piece of unrest myself, and everything she said or did was always so painfully precise and proper. I wondered sometimes if anything on earth could move her out of that perpetual calm. She was a good woman; everybody said so, and surely everybody could not be mistaken; but to me religion never looked particularly interesting when contemplated from Aunt Martha's stand-point. She was quite faultless in her orthodoxy, and rigidly systematic in her teach-

ings. Every morning and evening she gathered her family together for prayers, and Sundays spent all her spare time in instructing Phil and me. It was a dreadful day to us, I am free to confess. All through the week the shadow of the Catechism and sundry unlearned Psalms hung like a pall before my mental vision. Phil used to declare the sword of Damocles was nothing to it. For me, I did not dare indulge in comparison—it was the crowning point of all my woes to “keep Sunday.” On that day the old mother dollie and all her children, an innumerable host, were laid away on a shelf, and never by any mischance did I get a look at them, or, as I grew older, at any book either, unless its contents had been previously examined and approved. I had learned verse after verse, chapter after chapter in the Bible; I knew it by heart, I thought, and I just hated it all. I said I was like “Topsey”—meant to be “awful wicked”—and so let it go. Very clearly Aunt Martha, like Miss Ophelia, was destined to have a sorry time of it.

For the rest of that day, however, I settled down quietly by her side, not caring to wander off again alone, my heart beating tumultuously every time I thought of my strange meeting with

the crazy man on the beach. I knew aunt would never let me go there alone if I told her, and I had resolved upon taking one of the dogs with me, and going to the terrace the very next day to see if the strange little craft and the still stranger sailor were in sight; but though I traversed the beach for many a day after that, and swept the sea for a glimpse of the tiny yacht, my search was never rewarded by an answering sail.

The weather began to be oppressively warm. I kept away from the shore all day, when the sun stood high in the heavens and beat down upon the white sands until it seemed like molten silver to my feet. I only went there in the early morning or toward nightfall; the rest of the time I spent in searching out the coolest spot in the wood, or under the tall old trees out on the lawn. Sometimes, clambering over the stone walls, I ventured into our neighbor's domain. It was too pretty a place to remain shut up this way these beautiful summer days, I thought, walking once up to and around the house, which was old-fashioned, but after all a stately dwelling for these parts. It had a high, pointed roof and clustering chimneys, and on one side a tower with a small wing attached, and a mansard roof, showing modern taste had

been at work and spoiled the whole thing, as is most frequently the case. There was not a sign of life visible anywhere. The windows were all closed, the lawn looked neglected with a thick rank undergrowth of grass, and everything spoke of a long absence from the place. "I wish they were here," I thought. "If there were any children in the family, what a delight it would be—nothing but a stone wall to clamber over, and oh! what joy to have a playfellow!"

"Who are these Endicotts, aunt?" I asked one day after an unusually long survey of the deserted dwelling. "And are they never coming to their home again? Do you know them, and are there any little girls?"

Aunt knew nothing. I might have known it before I asked her; but Jane would know, and to Jane did I go. Jane always knew everything; of course she could tell me their whole history. "Mrs. Endicott was a widow—an old lady, and an invalid, abroad for her health, she believed."

"And no little girls, Jane?" I interrupted.

"None, Miss; but she has a son—"

"Oh! I don't care for a boy," I said poutingly. "She may stay where she is, or go to Jerusalem, and he with her—the house is just as well shut up."

But I felt a very great deal of freedom after that to wander about in the grounds and idle away much of my time in the dilapidated summer-house, dark and cool, with vines running over it in the wildest luxuriance—a nice place to run away and read whatever I could lay my hand upon. By and by the summer-house began to be quite a piece of my own property, possession being, in my eyes then, even much more than nine points of the law.

One day, lying in my favorite nook, quite hidden from observation, I became conscious of an unusual noise in the direction of the house; a hammering and pounding and a sound as of opening and shutting doors. I started up, ran out on the walk, and saw, to my great surprise, the shutters of the mansion were all unclosed, the long windows open, and a bustle as of people working within. Then a woman came to the window, and a great beating of pillows and blankets began, while two or three workmen with carpenter's tools were below stairs hammering and carrying in boards. I stood and watched them a long time. Surely the family must be coming home, I thought, as I walked away, wondering how I could ever manage to do without the summer-house, and still

wishing there were some little girls to share it with me. When I reached the boundary line of home, the stone wall, I climbed up on it and sat down, with the greatest interest to watch the movements of the men. Presently some one came out to cut the grass. He looked up, when he saw me, with a pleasant smile, and when he came near enough to warrant conversation, I ventured to ask if the family were coming home. "He believed they were," he made answer. "Mr. Paul had taken a run down and ordered a general 'fixing up' of matters. It was high time they *was* furbished up a little, everything was going to rack and ruin."

It was very pleasant watching the man as he walked rapidly forward, swinging his long scythe, and filling the air with the fragrant smell of newly cut grass and clover-blossoms. I thought I could do it quite as well as he. It seemed so easy, just to fling that sharp steel blade around him so lightly. I liked to watch him and hear the sweep of the scythe and the fall of the heavy grass. It was vastly more interesting than even the "Pilgrim's Progress," which I had been reading all that morning. I laid the book on the wall, and leaning my chin on my hands, waited until the man should finish his long row and then come back to me

again. Then he would stop for a rest, and I would have some question to ask, and so as the day and the mowing were nearly completed, I found out from my garrulous friend that he lived down in the village—had a wife and two little children—was “mighty glad the Endicotts were coming home, and chances again of many a day’s work for them”—that the family had always been so good and kind to him, and Mr. Paul a very saint upon earth, if one could credit Milesian extravagance. Presently I began to be glad he was coming too—at any rate it would be a change, and child though I was, this wonderful Mr. Paul might take some notice of me. I had no very clear idea who he was—I fancied he must be the owner of the place, from all the man said. When he took up his scythe and went over to the side of the lawn, touching his ragged hat to me, I jumped down and ran in to tell Aunt Martha the news. The house was quite full of purple twilight, and as I ran stumbling into the parlor, after my usual headlong fashion, I at first could see nothing. But I thought the room empty until I came up to the window, and I started back in surprise as a tall, dark figure, half hidden by the curtain, rose as I entered, coming toward me with, “I beg your pardon. I have

been waiting some time for Miss Lee—will she soon be at home? ”

“Aunt Martha?” I interrogated with all the *gaucherie* of childhood, and then looking up, even in the dusky light, struck by instant recognition, I saw before me my crazy sailor friend. He was standing before me with one hand extended, evidently remembering me, and bent upon meeting me as an old acquaintance. I hardly knew what to do. I blushed, tried to say something, failed utterly, and finally placed very reluctantly the tips of my fingers in his extended palm, and managed to stammer out again interrogatively, “Aunt Martha?”

“I should be glad to have the honor of her acquaintance,” he made answer in a low, musical voice, but just as full of teasing jest as when I heard it that day on the beach; “but first will you allow me to make yours? and formally to introduce myself as your nearest neighbor, Paul Endicott, and then to ask your pardon for frightening you as I did a few weeks ago?”

Then he had called to see me, after all, and not Aunt Martha! Miss Lee! I really didn't know just what to say. He still retained my hand in his, standing before me, “waiting to be forgiven,” he said. What should I do?

"I was very rude," he went, "but I am sure you will pardon me and accept me as a friend and neighbor in the future—on good behavior, you know."

"It was very silly of me," I said, finding my voice at last, which sounded to me very thick and husky, as if I had grappled it somewhere in the region of my boots and dragged it up by main force. "Pray say no more about it. I ought to have known better, but I thought—I was afraid," and between awkwardness and embarrassment down went my voice again like a plummet.

"You were never afraid of *me*? Am I so terrible a personage, then?" giving the yellow locks a little toss.

"I thought you were crazy," I confessed with my usual bluntness. This time he laughed. A pleasant laugh he had—low and musical, like his voice.

"Well, am I forgiven? Yes? Then won't you ask me to take a seat, or must I make my best bow and depart?"

"I would be very glad if you would stay," I said, feeling that a babe in arms might do greater credit to Aunt Martha and her rules of deportment than I, and ready to cry with vexation that she

did not come. He took my hand and led me back to the open window, and gave me a chair by his side.

"I mean we shall be very good friends," he said after a little time. "I will never call you Dorothea any more."

It is hardly necessary to say I was in a tremor from head to foot at having to entertain for the first time in my life so fine a young gentleman as Mr. Paul Endicott. Had he met me on the beach, or in the woods, or even had he claimed acquaintance with me as I sat perched on the stone wall only an hour or two before, I could have managed the introduction and conversation tolerably well. But to be treated like a lady—to be receiving a visit just like a grown-up person in the parlor, was almost too much for the mistress of Hilton Lee.

And while he was making conversation with the evident intent of humanely putting me at my ease, I was lost in the thought that my face and hands would look a deal better if they were suffered to touch water and a crash towel, and my hair to be beguiled out of the "Traddles surprise," by a vigorous application of comb and brush. And my thoughts going this way, my eyes very naturally were roaming over my companion. I wondered

if he were laughing at me, and though my cheeks burned at the thought, I inwardly cried out he was the most elegant youth mine eyes had ever beheld. I was glad he hadn't obeyed my behest and gone "with his mother to Jerusalem." I hardly spoke, but like the owl, "kept up a terrible thinking," while Mr. Paul entertained me with bits of lively talk, about his boat, and his college chums and their boats, and the great fun it would be, now they were down on the shore, and the company he would have, and the sails they would take.

"I mean you shall sail in her some day, too," he said, "that is, if you will. She is a beauty."

And then I found my voice suddenly, and ventured to ask her name, and discovered it was the *Scud*, and she was lying in a little cove, about two miles below our beach, and "would I go see her some day?" And before I knew it, all the huskiness vanished from my throat, and we were talking quite like old friends when Aunt Martha came in from her drive, preceded by Jane bearing candles. We were laughing as merrily as a couple of children, and I had entirely forgotten my hair, when I looked behind Jane and saw Aunt Martha. A man of forty could not have

met her with more graceful ease, I thought, than did my new-found friend. I managed to say, "Aunt, this is our neighbor, Mr. Endicott," and then he very pleasantly told of our meeting on the sea-shore, which had emboldened him into calling, and that, "as a child he used to have the 'open sesame' of Hilton Lee at all hours, and it seemed only right to come here the first thing." And then the talk glided off into inquiries of Mr. Hilton, his manner of life, etc., etc., for, as Aunt Martha confessed, though a relative, we knew but little of him. There had been for many years a sort of tacit coolness between the houses of Lee and Hilton, so irretrievably mixed up and bewildering, that no one on either side had ever taken the trouble of disentangling the error and confusion. And so it fell about that Phil, being a Hilton, lost the inheritance, and I, being a Lee, got it. Mr. Paul had many pleasant things to tell us of this munificent relative of mine, whom I had never seen or heard of scarcely until a few years before. He was a fine old gentleman, he said, with a few crotchets, which was but natural for a man living so lonely and secluded a life. But he had a noble, kind heart, as many a poor family hereabout would testify, and he lived as he had died,

a devoted Christian. And from that Aunt Martha wandered away to the little church which had been so richly remembered in Mr. Hilton's will, and we found the Endicotts belonged to the same parish—and then, to my infinite surprise, confusion, and dismay, I heard this young gentleman distinctly telling Aunt Martha he himself was destined for the Church. I sat quite petrified and motionless after this! To be religious at all was disagreeable enough to my mind, but to hear this jesting, yacht-loving boy, telling Aunt Martha in cool blood that he was studying for the ministry was sufficient to astonish me into silence for a month at least. I rubbed my eyes and looked again, but his face was quite grave now, and he was talking as soberly of his mother's happiness in the choice of his pursuit, and of his own clear sense of duty in the matter, as he had before of his pride in the *Scud*, and the delight of his college companions in the same. What did a minister want of a yacht, I thought, and how could he laugh and jest with me as he had been doing the whole evening, and why wasn't he solemn and awful? I liked him, but I had an innate horror of the profession, always saving and excepting dear old Mr. Milnor, the memory of whose gentle

and happy life seemed always lingering in my heart like the presence of the prayer with which he had consecrated me, and which I never thoroughly forgot. I shrank within myself when I remembered it then. The daughter of a pure saint now resting in the Paradise of God—all her life the child of many prayers—and yet carrying about with her a heart so rebellious, so full of repugnance, of positive dislike for all that was good and true and holy in the life of a Christian. Why could I not be good too? And then there flashed across my mind for a moment the thought that it was only those who were truly good who could possibly be light-hearted or merry.

And all this time while I sat there in a shocked and perplexed silence, Mr. Paul Endicott was going over very gravely and in quite a changed tone of voice the doubts and perplexities which had beset him before he had taken this all-important step.

“It has been the dream of my mother’s life,” he said, passing his hand over his eyes for a moment, and then looking up with a bright smile. “My only doubts have been of my own fitness—but even those doubts are sometimes my strongest encouragements. I feel then perhaps more keenly

than ever how little one can rely on one's own strength. One verse oftener than any other comes up to me, and I feel it sometimes my greatest safeguard."

He stopped, then said softly, while his eyes had a far-away, dreamy look, "'Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.' Oh! if one should fall," he said, almost under his breath. Then he rose up abruptly, holding out his hand to Aunt Martha—

"I am trespassing upon your time, and forgetting all rules of propriety in this my first visit. But it seems almost like home to me in this dear old room, and I must confess I had forgotten the lateness of the hour." He shook hands with us both, and would not be tempted into remaining longer, though Aunt Martha pressed him to do so. "His mother would be here soon," he said, "and then he hoped we would kindly visit her, she being a great invalid."

"Would he stay at the house to-night?" Aunt Martha asked.

"No, he was going to walk down the beach two miles to his yacht. He was going to the city to-morrow," and then calling out good-night, we heard his rapid footfall echoing on the hard gravel

walk in the stillness of the soft summer night, and I dropped back in the window seat, feeling for the first time in my life as if I had found a firm, true friend—but oh! why, why must he be a clergyman?

CHAPTER IV.

Now that I knew Mr. Paul Endicott, I felt quite privileged to run around as usual without fear of another crazy encounter on the sands. Also I wandered about on their side of the stone wall, even going up to the house to note the improvements going on there, and taking possession of the little summer-house again, whenever I pleased to do so. I looked every day for his coming again, with an eager delight I did not attempt to hide. Having only Phil and myself to dream over, I very naturally wearied of the subject, and was glad that this new-comer had widened the channel of my thoughts. Aunt Martha too was quite profuse in her praise, and declared for so young a person she had seldom seen one who had interested her more deeply.

“My dear Agatha,” she said, “he will really be a great acquisition, and if his mother is the least like him, I am sure our life down here will be anything but lonely.”

"Aunt," I asked one day, resolving to have some of my doubts settled at once, "don't you think—don't you think he is—ever so little—funny, for a clergyman?"

She looked at me in her serene way for a moment before replying: "I think you are funny, Agatha; and I think that is hardly the word to apply to young Mr. Endicott. I think him a most gentlemanly person, and for so young a man decidedly an attractive one—and his profession is—of course it is perfect."

"I think," I said boldly, "he would look far better if he were captain of his little yacht. If I were a man I'd be in the navy or army. I don't like to think of Mr. Endicott in a pulpit. I know I should laugh."

"You do surprise me, Agatha," and the gray eyes turned reprovingly upon me; "any one would think you were brought up in Fejee, instead of a Christian land, and under the very droppings of the sanctuary, as it were, all your life. Why is it so, Agatha? Have I failed so signally in my duty to you that you have such a distaste for religious things?" And startled out of her usual calm, my aunt's tone did border somewhat upon regret.

"I don't know," I said doggedly, though touched

in spite of myself by the lingering remorse in her face, "I don't think the fault is yours at all, auntie. I'm just about as wicked and bad as a child can be, and the worst of it all is," and I lowered my voice so Jane should not hear the unusual confession from me, "I don't care."

Aunt Martha drew me to her suddenly. For the first time—oh, in ever and ever so long—she leaned down and touched her lips to my forehead. "My child," she said, "pray, if not for my sake, for your mother's, remember some of the teachings which I have so imperfectly given you. Pray, Agatha; not only for yourself, but for me too."

My poor aunt! I don't think I ever came so near loving her in all my life as I did that night.

The pleasant month of July was very nearly ended. The Endicotts would not have very much time to spend by the sea if they tarried longer, though perhaps, as Jane suggested, they would remain all the year round, once they were back home again. I found myself thinking more of them every day, and speculating over the causes which kept them away, until no old and tried friend could be more ardently longed for than were these strangers from whose friendship I hoped so much. I felt my loneliness growing upon me more

and more. I tried play, then I tried study. For two or three days the plan worked well, but I was too mercurial and unstable to settle down upon any one steady course of either action or inaction. It was very stupid, my aunt declared, to have no one of my own age ever to speak to. She would be sincerely glad for her part when we went back to the city again.

One day, after writing Phil an unusually long letter, full to overflowing of my petty tribulations, I took my book and went out on the lawn to read. But the sun crept in under the branches and dazzled my eyes and made my discontented little head ache, so I went up to the old stone-wall and found shelter under a wild grape-vine, which grew over a tree, and in whose luxuriant shadows I soon lost myself as well as in my book. It was an odd thing for a child of my years to read and like. It was "Rollin;" but the only portion I ever read or cared for was the history of Alcibiades—everything that told of the young Athenian, accomplished, handsome, witty, gay, chivalrous, had a charm for me. Over and over I read it. The thirty years' war—the battles by sea and land—the changeful fortunes of my hero. The wise guardianship of the great Pericles—the wiser

training of the immortal Socrates—the triumphs of Artaxerxes and Lysander—all faded into nothingness when I read of this youthful diplomat and warrior—and then his miserable death at the last. Even that, tragic as it was, I loved to linger over. Very clearly I should know nothing of ancient Greece, or of the Medes and Persians, if I got no farther than Alcibiades.

Some one walking on the graveled path close by the wall, on our neighbor's domain, roused me; some one walking slowly and singing. The words were new to me. He was singing them over softly to himself, but I heard every word clear and distinct:

“One sweetly solemn thought
Comes to me o'er and o'er,
I'm nearer home to-day
Than I ever have been before.”

I put aside the trailing grape-vine and looked down. Beneath me, yet so close that I could have put out my hand and touched him, walked my lately-found friend, Paul Endicott. He had been reading, for he carried a book in his hand, but he was not looking upon its open page. His head was thrown back; his blue eyes, dreamy and far away, were fixed on vacancy. He paced slowly

down the walk, and was soon lost to sight in the shrubbery of the garden. I had never seen him so clearly in broad daylight before, and I drew a long breath when he had vanished. "He is like Alcibiades!" I said, shutting my book and leaning my head upon my hands in a transport. "I have never seen any one like him in all my life before! But Alcibiades surely was never intended for a clergyman!"

Lost in this thought, and in another as well, the pleasure of seeing him back at last, I sat leaning upon my neglected book until he came slowly around the walk again. He was passing me all unnoticed as he had before, when I moved on my perch and attracted his attention. Then he came up to the wall and put aside the vines, calling me a little "nixie" for hiding away so—and "how had I been," and "did I know he and his mother had been at the Hall for nearly two days—and would I jump down and go with him for a walk, or would I stay where I was in the shade and let him stand there and talk to me." And then he picked up my book and laughed when he saw the title, and declared it should be "Blue Beard" or "Cinderella," at the least. And then I glanced at his and read, "Taylor's Holy Living and

Dying," and shut it up again with a sort of shudder.

"It's a horrible book," I said, "isn't it? What can there be interesting in such a dreary thing?"

A sudden flush of surprise passed over his face.

"What is so 'horrible?'" he inquired, "the living or dying, my little friend, that you seem so shocked?"

"The dying," I said under my breath. "Oh, it is so hard to think of that."

"And I find life the harder of the two," he answered softly. "It is so hard to live *aright*. To know that every action—every thought of the heart tells so upon the life hereafter. That as we live here, so shall we be judged at the last great day. I don't think death ever seems to me quite so hard as all that."

I had not a word to say to this. Only an instant before I had been comparing him to Alcibiades, and he had met me with a laughing jest about my "nixie black eyes," and five minutes after we were talking of death and eternity as solemnly as if that were all I had thought of since our last meeting. The blue eyes were grave now, and full of kindly inquiry; they had such a quick way of changing from grave to gay, from laughing

merriment to earnest thoughtfulness. He was very handsome, but I didn't like even him in such a solemn mood, and hurriedly changed the subject.

"Did you come down on a cloud?" I asked. "I heard no bustle of arrival, and fancy you must have come that way."

"Something very like it," he answered laughingly. "I came in the *Scud*. Come, you said you wanted to see the little vessel; she lies in the cove yonder; if you will get your hat we can take a short cut through the woods and be down to the beach very soon; will you go?"

I slipped from my seat and ran breathlessly up to the house. It wasn't necessary for me to tell Aunt Martha where I was going; my ever being in the house was the exception, not the rule, and she had long before given up inquiries concerning my wanderings.

"Well, here you are," he said when I came back, giving me his hand and lifting me over the wall. "It don't take you quite the time it usually takes young ladies to make their toilets. I like that hat—it's sensible—"

"I am not a young lady," I said gravely. "I am not fourteen years old yet."

"Pray don't inform me of the melancholy fact! I am longing for a companion more than I can tell, and you dash all my hopes to the ground in one fell blow."

"And I am very lonely since Phil went away," I confessed. "I am only too glad to go with you to-day."

"And who is Phil, pray?" he inquired.

"Oh! Phil is my cousin. He is away at school—we were never separated until he went away this year. That is why I am so very lonely—because I am too big to play with dolls now."

"I should think so; and how do you manage about the education system? Do you go away to school too?"

"Oh! no, I hope not. We go back to the city when it is too cool to stay here—then I take up my lessons again there. I don't like it, though," I said confidentially; "I had vastly rather stay here and read whatever I please."

"Were you reading Rollin just now to please yourself, or did you call it study?"

"Oh! to please myself. I like to read of the great war—and I love Alcibiades; do not you? Pray, Mr. Endicott, why are you not a soldier?"

We were walking along the garden path, under

the shadow of the tall old maples, and my companion towering above me, graceful, elegant, like the Athenian of whom I delighted to read and dream; but he stopped short when I spoke, looking down at me with the most unfeigned surprise in his boyish face.

"A soldier? Because, Miss Agatha, it is the last profession on earth for which I have a taste. I am a lazy fellow naturally, too indolent by far, in the first place, to ever make choice of such an uncertain life. Then I don't like the idea of war, anyway. 'Thou 'shalt not kill'—you remember that Commandment?"

"Yes, but," I argued, "that must mean isolated cases of willful murder. War and battle were ordained of God, sometimes." And the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets, who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. "Oh! I know enough of the Bible to know that," I said, with a little dignity.

“Very true ; but under the new dispensation—under the law of Christ, can you tell me where He, the great lawgiver, bids us war upon one another, and to sack cities, and burn towns, and make homes desolate, all under the false cry of glory and honor ? ”

“ ‘ I came not to send peace upon earth, but a sword, ’ ” ventilating good Aunt Martha’s Bible lessons with a vast deal of pride, but without really knowing why I used that as an argument.

“ But you don’t take that literally. I take it as the warfare of truth against error ; religion against idolatry ; the doctrines of Christ against the world, the flesh, and the devil ; don’t you ? ”

“ I don’t know, ” I said ignorantly, and feeling that I knew too little of such things to offer another remark on the subject ; “ I don’t care, either. If I were a man I would be a soldier, and I would try and be like Alcibiades, ” going back to my old allegiance.

“ And why ? ” he persisted. “ He was not a good man. ”

“ I don’t care for being good, ” I said, wickedly ; “ everybody liked him, and that is all one wants. It seems to me wonderful that one man could make everybody do just as he pleased they should

do, and carry all hearts with him, whichever way he might choose to go."

"And perish miserably in the end," said my companion, gravely, "and only have it recorded of him, that he never loved any one, himself being his sole motive, nor ever found a friend. I think that a very sad epitaph."

"Not so sad as many we see in the churchyard," I said sepulchrally; "I saw one the other day, I wish I could remember;" then stopped when I saw how soberly he was looking at me.

By this time we had reached the fence which bounded the Endicott grounds. There was a little stile over which we passed, and then we were in a thick dark wood, with its heavy undergrowth of scrub-oak and twisted vines, through which he pushed his way, holding back the boughs for me to pass under. There was not a ray of sunshine piercing through this thick green, but there was an ample supply of the lacking sunlight in my face and heart.

"You are a born Gipsy," he laughed, as he saw me scrambling through the bushes. "Your cheeks are as red as a rose, and your eyes as bright as two little stars. Tell me, am I as good a companion as the famous Phil?"

"Oh! better," I said quickly. "Phil will tease me sometimes, and then sometimes we get tired of each other, after all."

"As you may get tired of me!"

I laughed and plunged on into another thicket, coming out with "old broad-brim," as Phil called it, in my hand, and sundry scratches on my hands and face. It was a perfect delight for me to explore these woods for the first time, with the cheery, pleasant voice of my companion in my ears, chatting first of one thing, then another; going from grave to gay, from lively banter and jest to sudden, serious mood: just like the changing light which came to us ever and again through the wood. By the time we reached an open space we were both fain to sit down and rest. And then in the stillness of the forest we heard the steady, even boom of the surf, not very far away on the shore, and sat silently for a long time listening to its familiar voice.

"Isn't that beautiful?" I said, breaking the silence first, and feeling the act almost a sacrilege.

"What, the sound of the sea? Yes. I love it; but I was born here, near it, you know. I think we always love those things a little stronger when

they are thus associated with our very earliest recollections; do not you?"

"I don't know," I answered. "I never saw the sea, nor had the most remote idea of its size, except as I got it from books and maps, until I came here four months ago. I can not begin to tell you how I felt when I saw it first, and I can not tell you now how I love it. I think by far the better part of all which Mr. Hilton left me, was the little strip of rock, looking out over the water, and the great song the waves are always singing, and which no one can ever possibly claim away from me. I wish we might always live here."

"And will you not?"

"Perhaps, one of these days—if I am ever my own mistress I know I shall; but there is a horrid, stupid life to get through before I am eighteen, you know."

"Only five years," said Mr. Endicott, coolly.

"*Only!*" I echoed. "It seems to me a lifetime."

"You may make it tell on all your life-time in the future, if you use the time to good advantage," he said softly.

And then fearing he would be solemn again, I ran off to gather some bright green mosses and

ferns which were growing around the trunk of a fallen tree, and he came after and helped me, and soon we were laughing and making quite a little collection of botanical treasures, until we remembered the boat, and took up our march again. A few steps brought us to it, and the "cove" he had been telling me of. Oh, what a place it was! I thought I had never before seen anything so beautiful. Down at our feet it lay, a wedge of silent, glistening silver, in among the green salt meadows on either side, and rocking idly on its glassy surface the most perfect little vessel I had ever seen, with a flag just dropping from her peak, for there was not air enough to stir its folds. Then out beyond, this wedge of silver spread and widened until it lost itself in the sea, and on one side a bar of white sand ran, like a long, thin, shadowy arm clasping the whole, and over it we heard the breakers thundering and dashing. All day the air had been dense and full of heat, but the hush and the coolness of nearing twilight had fallen upon everything, and only this roar, distinct even in the distance, broke the quiet of the hour as we strolled idly along the bank. I was too little to take his arm like a fine young lady, so he led me by the hand down the slope.

"Would you like to go on board?" he asked.
"Would you like a sail to-night?"

"Oh, ever and ever so much," I said, with a frantic sense of delight. "But how can we ever get there?"

"So easy!" squaring his shoulders with a look of pretended importance; "I am Aladdin, and I'll just rub the wonderful lamp, and you'll see the slave presently."

He put up his hands like a speaking-trumpet and halloed through them, and an instant after a man in a red flannel shirt tumbled on the deck and answered the call, and like magic, indeed, a little boat soon put off from the yacht, the red-shirted man in it rowing toward us while we waited on the bank; the very boat I had watched so many weeks before, "flying the white breaker," from my perch on the ledgy rock, where I had dropped to rest after my fright. When its keel grated the shore the man sprang out, pulling it up high and holding it there while Mr. Paul lifted me in and gave me a little seat way up in the bow by myself; then taking another pair of oars, away we shot, the two dipping the long, thin blades regularly and evenly in the water, and in a few minutes bringing us alongside of the vessel, which lay mid-

way in the stream. Then while the man held the boat firmly, he jumped on board and soon lowered a little pair of steps, up which I clambered with the help of his hand, and with a spring was by his side on the deck, and lost in delight at the beauty of the miniature ship. Over it we went, and if it had been the *Great Eastern*, I don't think I could have been more filled with wonder. Of course I had to ask plenty of useless questions, and by the time the sails were up and we were gliding through the water with scarce enough wind to fill the crowding canvas, I thought myself vastly well informed in nautical matters, and was willing to go below decks and take a peep at the cabin. And Mr. Endicott was smilingly ready to tell me all I wished to know, and let me ask questions to my heart's content, born Yankee that I was.

"Isn't this lovely?" I said when we went up again, and I was fairly seated by his side, beaming upon him in a great state of beatitude, as we sailed away—happy as two children, I for one forgetting even my pet Alcibiades, when I looked up into my companion's blue eyes and saw he was enjoying it just as much as I. "Sailing away! Dropping down from the beautiful bay," leaving the shore behind us, the wind freshening the farther we

went, and the canvas rustling over our heads as we glided on and on, nearer and nearer the broad opening which lost itself in the sea.

"What are you thinking of?" he asked, as I sat leaning my head on my hand, and looking back toward the fast-receding shore.

"It must be a fine thing to be a sailor," I said, "and to live on the sea all one's life. I think I should be a sailor if I were a man."

"How often would you change your mode of life, pray inform me? An hour ago you would be a soldier," trying to produce a most awful frown, but failing utterly. "Are you as unstable in your friendships?"

"I hope not. I have never been tried—I've never had anybody but Phil."

"And he has enjoyed a strict monopoly, has he? Well, I'll divide honors with him in the future."

"I like you better than Phil," I said candidly. "I would like to have you for a friend always."

"A good beginning! I'm not used to compliments—debts always were a burden to me, and I must discharge mine instantly. I'll promote you at once; you shall be first mate—I'm the captain, you know."

"Very good!" clapping my hands. "Has the first mate the privilege of her tongue—may she give orders, etc.?"

"When the captain is away the mate takes his place."

"I feel quite grand already; but has the mate to obey orders at all?"

"By all means. That's the best part of it. Everybody is under the captain."

"Then I'd like to be captain."

"Serve your time out as mate first, and be thankful. I might have made you a deck-boy, if I had pleased."

"One of these days I will have a yacht of my own," I said reflectively. "I shall be quite fit to command her by that time," ignoring his last remark. "I will have her built like this, only I shall give her a much more beautiful name."

"Alcibiades?" making a flimsy pretense of gravity.

"No, indeed!" I answered; "some pretty Indian name. How would Minnehaha do?—laughing water; it's so pretty, isn't it, only it's rather common. How would Shawandasse do?"

"Capitally, little castle-builder, or boat-builder, rather."

"Well, what would you have me do?" I said. "One must have her dreams and her castles, or boats, as you may please to call it; everybody does so; even I at my age have had mine!"

"Had? Then they are past—dreams over at thirteen?" lifting his eyebrows.

"Well, the one dream of my life has come and gone," I said, feeling that he was longing to laugh at me. "I used to think if I had this home and was independent, and had not to go to Aunt Martha for everything, I should be perfectly happy. Phil and I used always to console ourselves with 'When our ship comes from over the sea,' and mine came one day and brought me all this," spreading my hands out toward my home. "I haven't sent out a single bark since then."

"Then you can't look for any returns to port, as I am looking all the time. I send out so many sails that more than half are wrecked before they ever see port. Come, send out a sail or two to-night to keep my fleet company."

"Your fleet, eh?"

"Yes, a perfect Armada of good resolutions, solemn wishes, prayers, and longings, more than I can begin to number."

"I don't like good resolutions," I answered.

"Let's wreck the whole fleet, and begin again. Let us have a little pleasure instead."

"Or combine the two," he said gravely.

The sun was just losing itself in crimson clouds, and he stood so long looking at them, and without saying another word, that I asked, "Where were his thoughts?"

"Do you remember, in 'Pilgrim's Progress,' how the light kept shining before Christian all the way, leading up to the little wicket gate?" asking the question in a low, dreamy voice.

And I answered "yes" in just as low a tone.

"Don't that path the sun leaves on the water make you think of it?"

"I wish we could sail right over it—up to the wicket, and get there soon. Eh, Captain Paul, wouldn't it be easy?"

"Well, let us go," he said, turning around, with his hand on the tiller, to look at me. "Say, shall we take the path and go straight on until we reach the Celestial City?"

"Really," I said, being very literal in all my ideas, "why, we could never reach it in that way."

"No, but we could reach it in another. Come, I will make a compact with you, little playfellow. We will take the path, and together, but not the

path shining over the seas yet awhile. We'll go on very quietly here for a little time, and I am sure can find the light ahead just as well. We'll help each other—that's what we will do—and in taking steps heavenward be learning something of one another."

"I might from you, but you could never learn anything good from me. I'm awful wicked, and it don't trouble me a bit."

"But it will trouble me," he said softly, "since you have told me of it; and I can not take one step toward the wicket without you. Say, will you help me with your company on the way?"

"I am Pliable," I said. "I shall get into the Slough, and you'll only have the trouble of dragging me out. I've been in it more or less ever since I was born, as auntie will tell you. Better go alone."

"Not a step without you."

"Then come drag me out," I said, holding up both my hands; "I'm in already."

"Really? What trouble now?"

And as we drifted slowly along, he put out his hand and drew me up to him.

"What has happened now?" opening his large, blue eyes to give me a good look.

"I don't want to be a saint," I said crossly. "Aunt Martha is one—everybody says she is—and I can't bear saints; and it's dreadful to be pious and to talk of dying, and I know you will talk to me just that way."

"No, I won't," he said, shaking his head, and going up to the red-shirted man to give some orders, and then amid a great flapping of sail and rattling of cords, the vessel rounded to, and bore toward the bay again. "We'll talk about going home now," he said, as he came back to me. "And so you have enjoyed the sail, have you? We will begin earlier next time. I'm a little afraid Miss Lee will not have a very exalted opinion of the captain or first mate, if we don't make port earlier than this."

"Why, the sun is not down yet," I said, looking up.

"But it will be before I hand you over the garden wall. Look! Isn't it beautiful up yonder?" pointing to the clouds.

Beautiful? I should think it was! Wouldn't it always be beautiful out there in the little cove, with the clouds so bright and piled up, just like the towers of a great, fair city, even the heavenly of which he had been talking.

“Nearer the great white throne,
Nearer the crystal sea—”

hummed my companion softly to himself, while the waves upon the shore seemed to rise up, stretching white arms toward me, and beating time to the soft music of the words as they trembled in my heart, while I looked and listened by his side.

I was quick to appreciate beauty of any kind. I didn't need my captain to point it out to me. I had seen it all in a flash while we had been talking of the wicket.

“I like to watch the clouds and the sea,” I said in a low voice. “It is always the same sea, yet never the same either. Never saying the same things, never singing the same songs, but each day more beautiful and wonderful. Heaven don't seem so far off as it does in the city,” I said musingly.

“It isn't so far away,” his eyes still fixed on the changing clouds.

“It seems very near and close sometimes, and it is so long to wait; and there are so many pitfalls and Giant Despairs and Doubting Castles to meet on the way. I wish I could put them all away now.”

And when he lifted me over the vessel's side

into the little boat once more I saw a shadow, graver than any I had seen before, resting upon the handsome face and quenching all the mirth out of the blue eyes. So that our walk home in the "gloamin" was a more silent one than our walk down. And the moon very kindly came up and condescended to beam upon us most serenely, while by its pale light we found our way back to the Lee, and I discovered that for once in her life Aunt Martha had roused sufficiently to send Jane out in search for me. But Mr. Endicott's explanations and excuses smoothed her brow very quickly again, and after he had gone, I sat down by her side and gave her a most incoherent and altogether original rhapsody on yachts, captains, red-shirts, and the glory of knighthood. An irretrievably mixed-up account I made of it, but the first mate of the *Scud* had no modesty regarding her new honors, and would have proclaimed the important fact from the house-tops if there had been any one below to hear.

CHAPTER V.

THUS the days and weeks flew by, and autumn was wearing on apace. Still Aunt Martha and I clung to our pleasant home at the Lee, and still Paul Endicott continued a most frequent visitor. There was scarcely a day that did not in some way end with our being together; oftenest upon the beach, where he loved to walk and dream and listen to the sea, as much as I, though it talked to him in a far different way, and much more solemnly, than it ever did to me.

I grew immensely nautical about this time, and talked of jibs, mainsails, and booms with a 'fore and aft' swagger as if I had been on a quarter-deck all my life, and knew nothing beyond it; and more than once I felt like telling Aunt Martha to "avast" as she was reviewing our Bible-lessons of a pleasant Saturday, when I would have preferred infinitely a stroll on the sands. I knew every rope, sail, and cord on the little *Scud* by that time. Again and again had I been on her

decks, sailing away with Paul through the golden sunset of those rare September days; sailing away until it seemed to me that nothing could be perfect or beautiful in life for me any more unless shared with him. I never called him Mr. Endicott. I began, it is true, most decorously, giving him his proper title, which resolved itself after a little into "Captain," and finally dwindled down, at his express desire, into simply "Paul." I was Aggie to him, the same as to Phil, and really he did not seem so very much older than I, after all, for he came down to my years and intellect, and was so bent upon taking the place of brother to me, that when six weeks had gone by, and I remembered I had only known him for that length of time, I could scarcely credit it as real. Whatever could he, a fine young student, find to please him in an uninteresting little girl of thirteen, was more a matter of astonishment to me than my fancy for him. He certainly left nothing undone to make me feel perfect freedom with him, though why he should have done so, was odd and unaccountable. He was always coming over to the house with a new book for Aunt Martha, or a magazine or paper for me, and whenever he went to the city, came back loaded with bonbons enough to make me ill for a

week if I had ever began to devour half the amount he supplied me with. And as for me, to walk by his side whenever and wherever he pleased to lead the way—to lean over the rail of the famous *Scud*, and to watch with him the silver track the vessel made in her speed; or in idle and delicious calm, to sit silent while we each dreamed our own dreams as we floated on with the swell of the tide; or again in the little summer-house, or perched on the ledge of the old gray rock overlooking the beach while he read to me—was delight and comfort enough to beguile me into forgetting all else but him. He was a friend, a brother indeed. Phil in all his life had never come so near to my heart as in that short month had Paul Endicott. One day I missed my friend. It was a lonely twenty-four hours, but I got through it; still another day came and went and no sign of him. I began to be seriously annoyed; surely something must have happened—I would go and hunt him up, I thought; but then some of his college chums might have come down and I would be very much out of place among them. No, I would stay where I was and improve my mind with a book. Paul was always advising some such profitable course. I went down into the parlor,

but found Aunt Martha monopolizing the bay-window, lost in the depths of her easy-chair, and reading with a face of serenest enjoyment. But at a glance over her shoulder I hardly considered it an exhilarating subject, inasmuch as it treated of the martyrdom of Polycarp. It made me very dismal to but think of it, so I went on into the library, opened the book-case, and dragged down Audubon into the window seat. I was soon lost in admiration of the pictures, if nothing more.

"Glad to see you so literary," said Paul's cheerful voice, sounding at my elbow, and I sprang up, and held out both hands to him as if I hadn't seen him in weeks.

"Where upon earth have you been hiding?" I asked; and then resentfully, "Are you tired of me already, that you ran away?"

"Ran away? You embodiment of ingratitude! Why, how long is it since I beamed upon your benighted little soul like a full moon rising?"

"A whole day and a half—no, three-quarters. Pray, what have you been about?"

"I have got a few duties in life left me yet," he said solemnly. "My maternal ancestor declares I might as well be back in college for all that she sees of me here. No, little Nixie. I must alter

my course of conduct speedily. I'll give you all of the day but the mornings and evenings; those go to my mother after this."

"And when will my share of the day begin?" I asked with a groan.

"About this time—now." And he tucked me under his arm, and off we flew down to the cove. There lay the *Scud*, and away we sailed.

What a pleasant ending to that dismally-begun day it proved to be! Paul steered to a part of the coast I had never seen before, and where a number of rough-looking men, in flannel shirts, stood to their middle in the water, raking with long iron rakes, and bearing big bags upon their backs. He explained they were raking clams or oysters, and we stood and watched them a long time, until he finally proposed going ashore and negotiating for some; and then we got in the little boat and rowed up to the beach; and as there was no surf on that side, Paul gave me my first lesson in rowing, and a great splashing and dashing of water was the feeble result, until he took the other pair of oars, and a few hasty strokes of his brought us to shore. And right there on the sands we had a most delightful impromptu "clam-bake." I took a ramble a little way back, collecting to-

gether all the chips and dried sticks I could find, and filling my invaluable old broad-brim with them, I made sundry trips to and fro, while Paul brought up the clams, raked together all the inflammable material we could find, and started our fire.

"It's quite a little Gipsy entertainment, Paul," I said as I brought my hat for the last time filled to overflowing, and decidedly the worst for the burdens it had borne. "But where did you get matches?"

"Oh, I've never got rid of my boyish habit of stuffing my pockets," he answered laughingly. "I have ever and ever so many things besides a tinder-box and flint there."

"Have you?" I said. "Have you anything good?"

"For instance, chocolate creams?"

"Well, yes. I wouldn't object to chocolate creams; but you could never carry them in your pocket, Paul. Tell me something more sensible than that."

"Macaroons, then," rifling the pocket of his walking jacket, "and a trifle or two in the way of fruit," pulling out some rosy-cheeked Bartletts, "and a suspicion, just the faintest suspicion of rare-ripes."

"What a jolly Captain the *Scud* has," I rapturously commented.

"Too jolly by far. I'm spoiling the first mate. She will never be able to come down to salt junk and hard-tack."

And then our fire being ready, we raked up the glowing coals and deposited a goodly supply of bivalves thereon, and sat down with begrimed hands and flushed cheeks to partake of the regal repast. I think I never enjoyed a meal more in my life, and since that day of charming recollections I can safely aver that a clam has been to me a "thing of beauty and a joy forever!" For Paul had made me a very happy child, and real unalloyed happiness was a rare thing in my life until I had known him. Somehow I never had been able to entertain as a sentiment of my own the very popular idea that childhood was the happiest period of one's existence. It had been anything but that to me until Paul came. I heard a great many grown-up people lamenting and bewailing the shackles of the poor slaves, and striving to sunder their bonds; but I never in all my life heard one gentle, pure-minded woman lift up her voice and earnestly protest against the unmitigated slavery of childhood. It is very true Aunt Mar-

tha was no feminine Legree, or modern Nero, in walking-skirt and balmorals. She very likely indulged me in my wild vagaries very much more than the generality of children are indulged; nevertheless it was extremely galling to me, as an incipient free-thinker, to have my mode of life, dress, and conduct as distinctly laid out for me as if I were a lump of clay, and my good aunt the potter. I inwardly rebelled against the whole system of servitude, and was glad to add day after day to my life, and rapidly emerge from it. Paul Endicott was helping me out of it more than even I could realize, and I was fast blooming out into opinions which were allowed, and tastes that were tolerated, simply because my new friend's protection was as good a warrant of proper conduct as if I had been bound over to keep the peace. Aunt would have been shocked if she could have seen me curled up on the sands that day, with grimy face and hands, no hat on, eating hot clams with my fingers, and a plentiful supply of ashes sprinkled on them in lieu of salt.

"This is vastly better than reading of Polycarp's martyrdom, with which auntie was so delighted to-day," I said.

Paul made two interrogation points of his eye-

brows, and I explained, adding the bivalves were the better of the two.

"Don't jest about such things," with a sudden changing to gravity, "but come sit here on the sands by me. I didn't show you all the fine things these ample pockets contained. Shall we rifle them once more, now the feast is ended?"

"Oh, yes," I assented, with the last "rare-ripe" rendering me very nearly speechless, "business first, pleasure afterward. Go ahead, Paul."

He had a book there, and I knew it, for I saw the brown paper package peeping from his pocket. He was always sending to the city for books, and it was one of the new ones. "Thank goodness," I said inwardly, "it couldn't be 'Taylor's Holy Living and Dying.'" And then he drew forth the little parcel and untied the cord very leisurely as he asked me if he should read.

I said "yes," but I kept my eyes on the book, feeling as if I had suddenly swallowed a dose of chloroform, instead of a peach.

"I bought them for you, Aggie," he said. "I fancied you would like them—if not now, you will when you get a little older."

They were two dainty little volumes in blue and

gold, and I caught up one delightedly, reading "Whittier's Poems" on the back.

"Oh, Paul!" I said with a sudden warmth that made him smile, "and are they really for me?"

"Really for you, Nixie!"

"How good you are to me, Paul! Why are you so good to me?"

"Shall I continue to be good? Shall I read you something?"

"Oh, yes—please. Was it Whittier who wrote the 'Changeling,' Paul?"

"Yes, and here it is. Shall I read it again to you?"

And throwing himself by my side on the sand, he read over for me the quaint, witching little story which I had read, and liked ever and ever so much, in one of the magazines he had brought down "to auntie."

And then turning over leaf after leaf, and reading me favorite bits here and there, he chanced upon one more beautiful than any which he had read before. Can there be any fitter place than down on the shores of the sea to hear for the first time in one's life the haunting melody and pathos of the "Swan Song of Parson Avery," or the

solemn and beautiful words of "My Psalm," which followed it, made still more solemn by the many-toned whisperings of the waters near? How the words spoke to my heart—deep, earnest, and thoughtful, yet simple enough for even a child to understand. My heart felt no longer rebellious, or skeptical, while I listened to the musical flow and rhythm of the words:

"The west winds blow, and, singing low,
I hear the glad streams run;
The windows of my soul I throw
Wide open to the sun."

How I longed to throw open the windows of my soul to just such sunshine. Oh, for faith; for just such faith as that. But I dared not frame my thoughts into words. I would not even to Paul confess how tender a chord the sweet words touched and woke in my heart.

I sat silent long after he had ended, and until he said in his quiet way, "You liked it, Aggie? Yes; I know by your face when you like anything; it's a mirror to me, and I read a great many things upon its tell-tale surface, sometimes."

"Oh, Paul," I said without looking up, "you read enough wickedness to shock you many times, then."

"I read that the door of the little rebellious heart will not always be barred to good and gentle thoughts. It will fling the portals wide open, and let in all the sweet sunshine waiting without. 'The angel sought so far away,' you will yet 'welcome at your door'; won't you, Agatha?" he said softly as he laid one hand on mine.

I did not answer, and tried to draw my hand away from his, feeling that he was going to talk solemnly to me in just the way he always ended every pleasure. He was like a sugar-coated pill, I thought—all the nice white sugar, to tempt one first; then the advice and good counsel, like the bitter, black dose under it all.

Neither spoke for several minutes after this. I was thinking of the pill, and piling up little sand forts at my feet, and Paul was writing my name on the white fly-leaf of my new book, and then marking one of the poems.

After we got home that night I hastily undid the wrapper, and read my name, the date, and "Down on the Sands" below it; and the words he had marked were these:

"The Present, the Present is all thou hast
For thy sure possessing:

Like the Patriarch's angel, hold it fast
Till it gives its blessing.
Why fear the night? Why shrink from Death,
That phantom wan?
There is nothing in heaven or earth beneath,
Save God and man;
Peopling the shadows we turn from Him,
And from one another;
All is spectral and vague and dim
Save God and our brother."

CHAPTER VI.

"AGATHA," said my aunt to me one night after one of these long strolls on the beach, as I came in with my hands full of shells, sea-tangle, and trailing moss, and my hair blown all about my face. "My dear Agatha, I would never have believed myself capable of surviving such an inundation of dried grasses, reptiles, and stones as has been accumulating in our garret of late. I took a trip up there to-day, and I verily believe you have rifled the sea. What do you intend doing with all these things?"

"I am making a collection, aunt," I said. "The sea-ferns and grasses I shall press. The minerals, together with the *Serpula*, *Echinus*, etc., I shall put in cases, or on the shelves, if I can't get the cases. To-day I got this," and I displayed admiringly the sea-horse which Paul had given me that very morning. She made a gesture of disgust.

"I do not know what new horror will seize

you when we get back to the city," she sighed plaintively.

"It won't be in some time yet," I said, putting the evil day away from my thoughts.

"It will be in just another fortnight," said Aunt Martha, "so make the most of it. I can not take you back to the city looking any more like a Gipsy, or an untutored savage, than you are looking already; pray spend the next fortnight as you have spent all this summer; and if it were not that such an exceedingly proper companion as Mr. Paul Endicott directed your tastes, I should most certainly object to the whole thing even now; as the case stands, suit yourself for the remainder of the time."

I knew I was always annoying aunt; my carelessness in dress; my unlucky feet, always laden with sand or mud; my disordered hair; my generally vagabondish appearance, was enough to provoke any one into losing a saintship, and now my inundation of filthy specimens in the hitherto clean garret, I felt to be a crowning point.

I had never a word to say, but I stole up to my treasures and sat down over them with clasped hands and tear-filled eyes. To go away—to leave all the pleasure behind, and for six long months to come to be pent up in an atmosphere of rigid

propriety—to go to school and say my lessons wearily—to take a daily walk on ugly stone pavements—to be away from Hilton Lee—from the great blue ocean—to be away from Paul!

I summed up all my grievances, crowning them thus: *To be away from Paul.* And at this last thought I leaned my face down upon my wet mosses and let my tears flow silently over them.

“What, little Nixie, up here and alone?” said Paul’s voice, sounding close to my ear.

“I have been looking all over for you in the garden, and your aunt told me I would find you here, making a collection. She said I might come and help you. What is it to be? A collection of tears?” And he pulled out his handkerchief and said I was to give the word when he should begin.

Ashamed to be found crying by him, I swallowed my sobs, never daring to lift my head. Then he put his arms about me and drew me to him.

“Little sister,” he said, “look up. Look up, and tell me what it is that grieves you so. Hush! hush!” patting my hand soothingly.

“Don’t be good to me,” I cried, throwing off his hand; “don’t be good to me any more. I have only to go away and leave it all—and don’t make it any harder for me than now.”

"Going away!" he echoed. "Where? To the source of the Nile? To the mountains of the moon, where I could not reach you if I tried ever so much? Speak, and I shall bear it bravely."

"You do not care at all," I said, half indignant with him that he should jest over my trouble. "You do not care, and it's just as well I am going away."

"Just exactly," in the same easy tone. "As I go away very soon myself, it matters little to me whether you are here or there. In any case, I shall not see you until Christmas time."

"But will I see you then?"

"You surely will, if we both live. My mother will go to the city, and I must come and see her. Why may I not see you as well? And now, away with melancholy, and to our 'collection.' Tears or grasses?"

"Neither," I said, "but you will please give me a helping hand with my minerals, and not say another word."

So Paul put up his handkerchief, and sorting out the best of the shells, we piled them in long rows upon one of the shelves which I had emptied for that purpose. Then the grasses, ferns, and moss we packed in a great heap on one side, to be

left for another day; and we worked over our curiosity shop, as we called our three shelves, until the shadows lengthened, and the twilight began to creep into the room.

“Tell me one thing,” I said as we went up to the open garret window, and looked out for a long time silently over the quiet landscape below; “do tell me one thing—shall you fit yourself for the Church, as you once told Aunt Martha you should?”

He looked down at me in an utterly perplexed, astonished manner.

“Why, child, that is what I am doing now. Why do you ask?”

Studying for the ministry! And owning a yacht, and sailing away with me day after day, rambling over the old woods, or out on the sands and into the surf; sometimes as much of a child as I, and studying for the ministry!

Was I dreaming? Evidently not; for, sitting down on the broad window seat, he drew me toward him.

“Aggie, tell me—am I so very unclerical? Do I seem to you so little fitted for this vocation, that you are surprised?”

This time the gay banter all died out of his tone, and his voice sounded to me full of pain.

I hung my head, not daring to meet the blue eyes.

"Tell me," he said again. "Let me know exactly what you think of me. Child that you are, I value your opinion."

"Then do not," looking desperately up at him, "do not any more; you are all that is good, manly, and true—too good by far—too good to throw it all away in a dull, stupid old pulpit; oh, no! you are fitted for anything, dear Paul; you can be anything you choose; but oh! not that; do not bury yourself that way!"

"Is that the reason?" he said, holding both my hands firmly in his, and looking down upon me as if he would read my very soul. "Is that the only reason? Have I never given you cause to think me an idler and a trifler—a waster of time in my Master's vineyard—an unfaithful steward? Oh! Aggie, if only it were not *that*!"

He seemed to feel it so deeply himself—all his own unworthiness at this time pressing upon his soul, darkened every other feeling.

The last lingering rays of the dying day stole

in through the open window and lit up the fair, boyish head, and showed me the deep blue eyes, serious and earnest, searching mine.

“It is so hard to be anything but light-hearted and happy,” he said after a moment’s silence. “And it is so pleasant to be again a child, as I have been this summer with you ; but none the less firmly have I held to this, the dearest scheme of my heart, the plan of my life. I laid it out before me when I first left home, while I was a boy in school. I kept that end in view, just as Christian kept the light shining at the little wicket ever before him. You are such a strange child, and have such strange ideas of things, that perhaps I have not talked to you quite as I should have done ; but all the same, this is one of the dearest hopes of my heart—to work, be it ever so feebly, while it is called to-day, in the vineyard of the Lord. Can you give me ‘God-speed,’ my little friend? Will you ask to-night, if you have never asked it for me before, that His Spirit may go up with me, and give me finally the rest for which my soul is longing?”

How grave and solemn his voice sounded to me in the hush of the quiet night. Was it the same Paul, who, an hour before, had pulled out his

handkerchief with such a comical face and asked leave to shed tears with me? I scarcely knew him, so changed was he. I didn't like him half so well in this sober mood of his; I wished he would do anything but talk religion to me. To be sure, several times he had spoken seriously, and would have said much more had I encouraged him to do so, but at this moment there seemed no possible way of averting it. I saw how it would be, and strove to rally.

"Come down-stairs," I said. "Aunt Martha would be petrified if she thought I was entertaining visitors in the garret. Come down to the parlor."

"Not to-night," he answered absently; but giving me his hand as he turned away from the window, "I do not feel quite like seeing Miss Lee to-night. Will you walk with me in the garden? or, stay, will you come out with me and see my mother? Yes, come with me and see my mother."

"She is so great an invalid," I said, "she will not care to be troubled with a child to-night."

"But she will welcome you very gladly, not only for your own sake, but mine as well. Come."

We went down the stairs hand in hand, like two children, and feeling our way cautiously along in

the darkness, until suddenly I recollected my disordered dress, rough hair, and mud-stained hands—alas! I had not looked a pair of gloves in the face since I came down to the Lee.

“Not to-night,” I said. “Oh, Paul, not to-night. Wait until we get in the hall, and then give one good look at me and tell me what your mother would take me for?”

And when under the full blaze of the suspended lamp, as I spread my hands and stood before him for inspection, even the grave look died out of his face, and he laughed as heartily as I.

“Quite a little nixie—there was no doubt about that.” And so he went off to his mother, and again I got rid of the long solemn talk with which he had threatened me that evening.

What a dreary thing it was to me to be pious, in those days.

CHAPTER VII.

THE fortnight sped all too rapidly away. The days were growing cooler, the nights almost too cool to be pleasant, with the air so fresh and keen blowing over us from the sea. But still Paul and I kept up our wanderings, still he occasionally dropped little serious thoughts down into my heart; and, without my daring to acknowledge it even to myself, giving me something to ponder over in the quiet of my room at night when alone; and, though I strove to resist the influence, it all unconsciously did retain a hold on my memory and heart.

Aunt Martha had called several times to see Paul's mother; I had never done so, although he had often tried to coax me into her sitting-room; but I was afraid of strangers, and feared their criticisms; besides, she was a great invalid, confined to her room much of the time, and if she were nervous at all, I felt confident my advent

would be like a trial of the rack to her delicate nerves; so I just stayed away. In the pleasant mornings sometimes I would see Paul take her for a little drive, in a low pony-carriage, or walking around the cool shaded paths near the house, leaning upon his arm, walking slowly, very slowly, and wrapped in her heavy shawl, although it was warm September weather. Then I knew, when he had taken her back very carefully into the house again, that some portion of that day was given to me, as she did not claim him again until evening, when she liked him to read or talk to her. Very happy evenings those were that mother and son enjoyed alone and quietly by themselves, if one could believe Paul's views on the subject, and we were never able to beguile him into spending any of them with us, unless she was too ill to have him with her.

The last days of our fortnight were come and gone. The last night we would be at the Lee followed all too quickly. The house looked lonely and deserted enough already, with the carpets rolled up and put away in the garret with my "collection," which really monopolized every square inch of room on the broad shelves. The furniture was all swathed up, each separate piece

looking as if it were wearing a shroud. The books, magazines, pens, paper, and little trifles which lumbered up the tables, had all been cleared away, and everything wore the desolate look of a house about to be shut up for the winter. The servants were gone, and only Jane remained to gladden auntie's heart, and our last tea was a very comical, impromptu affair, in which we ate solemn pieces of bread and butter and all the "odds and ends in the pantry," as Jane declared, drinking cold water instead of the warm chocolate, which my soul loved, *sans* table-cloth, *sans* knives, *sans* forks, *sans ceremonie*, and our breakfast the next morning was to be obtained on the boat. We had refused the invitations of the Endicotts to sup with them, but in the evening Paul brought over a basket of fine peaches and a message from his mother, "Would Miss Lee spend the evening with her, and so allow Paul to take one more ramble with his little favorite on the beach?"

"Just a good-bye, Miss Lee, to everything about here, you know; you will not refuse us?" And Aunt Martha yielding, he saw her across the lawn, and then came back for me, tucking me under his arm and pinning a shawl about my shoulders, though I rebelliously declared I should suffocate.

The night was beautiful and clear, and the moon was just coming up, striking a long, bright, silvery path over the sea, as we walked very silently down to the big rock on the sands. I was the first to break the silence.

"Oh, Paul," I said, "what shall I do without you?" clinging to his arm, looking up in his face, and, like a child, speaking the first unquiet thoughts of my heart at once.

But Paul had no answer to this, and when I looked in the grave face, showing white in the moonlight, I could not refrain from whispering:

"Are you sorry I am going away?"

"I am, indeed, little friend," with a slight tremor which I could not but notice in his voice, "more sorry than I can express, and yet I hope to see you very soon again."

"When?" I interrogated.

"When I come to my mother, in the city, at Christmas time. I shall find you out, you may rest assured. To be truthful, Aggie, I don't think the parting weighs so heavily upon me to-night as upon you. If we live, we shall certainly see each other again very soon."

"But not here," I said; "and oh, Paul, it has been such a happy, happy summer! If I do see

you at Christmas time, it will not be like having you all to myself down here."

And then he reached out a hand to me, which I took and pressed with all the gratitude and energy of my energetic nature.

"Yes, it has been a happy summer," he said, "a happy, happy summer," lingering over my words, and laying his other hand over mine. "And for all this happiness your heart has no thanks to give but to me? Oh, Agatha."

"I have meant to be good, indeed I have, Paul," I cried; "but I can't be good like you; I don't like pious people, and I don't love to read my Bible very much, and I don't love to talk of such things. Don't spoil this one last night, Paul!"

"No," he said, steadily, "I won't spoil our parting, I hope, but I must give you a few things to think over, now you are leaving me. You will remember them, Aggie, if only in memory of our pleasant two months together. You will promise me sometimes to *think* seriously and solemnly. I have been so grieved since I have known you, to think how little you give yourself to any earnest thought of the future. You are young, and a long, happy life is before you, I trust; but the young often die. I had a little sister once, who 'folded

the white tent of her life' and was laid down to rest under the violets when she was ever so much younger than you. I think that is one reason I have loved you so. She would be about your age now, had she lived. We see children dying around us every day, and why may not you? And you are old enough now to think and understand for yourself—"

"I sha'n't die," I interrupted, very coolly; "I was never in better health in my life," swallowing down a half-sob in my throat, for his grave, loving words touched me more than I was at all willing he should see.

He drew me suddenly closer to him.

"Oh, my sister, whom I have taken to love in the other little sister's place, I can not hear you speak so. Now, while it is called to-day, give the first love of your fresh young heart to the God who has cared for you so tenderly all your life, who has placed your feet out of rough paths into pleasant places. Oh, Agatha, try and love Him, and be grateful to Him for all His goodness and tenderest compassion."

"I wish I might, but what can I do? How shall I get along with no one to teach me? and where am I to begin? I don't know, indeed, what

you want me to do, Paul," I said, discontentedly. "I don't know how one can be good by just saying they will be. I've tried it dozens and dozens of times, and I think I'm always a little worse after it."

"Perhaps because you try in your own strength," he said, softly.

"Perhaps," I assented, waiting for him to say more.

"If we seek for strength aright," he went on, "it will be given us. If we ask in the humble spirit of a little child placing before its father all its wants and cares, we may hope for an answer to our petitions."

"I know I should fail," I said.

"You can not, if you will have faith." And then, very tenderly, "You will try, won't you? You will begin to-night? You will pray, not only for yourself, but for me; it will help me so much to think of it."

I felt for the moment utterly miserable and wicked! When had I, in this childlike spirit, asked, fervently and in faith, that I too might obtain the blessing? When had I knelt by my bed and prayed for strength and guidance through the day? I could not remember the time! How

could he ask for my prayers, when I so seldom prayed for myself?

"I will tell you the truth, Paul," boldly, finding my voice. "You shall know just how wicked I am. I don't mean to do it, but in the morning I am late and sleepy and tired, and Jane hurries me so, and Aunt Martha dislikes it if I'm not down to breakfast punctually."

"But your aunt has prayers most regularly, and there is one petition that surely all may join in—the 'Our Father;' that is enough; the wants of a life-time are all in that."

"Yes, I say *that*, it is true, but I don't think of the words I am saying half the time," I confessed, for now I was about it, I determined to make a clean breast of it; "I am more likely thinking of you, and how bright the sky is, and how lovely it will be out in the woods or on the beach; and I wonder if we will go sailing in the *Scud*, or if we shall have another famous clam-bake; and just about that time I hear 'amen,' and I jump up to find my hat, and start off."

"But the sun is not always shining," he said, "to tempt these roving thoughts of yours. It has rained twice this week."

"Oh, yes, but then I am worse than ever, Paul,

for I am so angry that the sun does not shine, and I must stay in the house, that I surely could say no prayers then. Do tell me what to do!"

"Hasn't your Bible told you, in all these years, Aggie?" he asked, reproachfully; "don't you ever go there for advice and comfort?"

"But I don't need advice or comfort," I persisted; "I get on beautifully this way."

"And you never feel in your heart a longing for something more than pleasure—an empty void, an unsatisfied want, a yearning for some friend nearer and dearer than all others, to counsel and guide you, and upon whose strong arm you can lean? Almost every one, even a child, has felt this wish grow upon them sometimes."

Surely I had. How many lonely, sad hours I had passed before I knew him! How many longings and fears had swept over my soul when I thought of the great life hereafter, and how sad and weird a song the waves sometimes sung to me! Yes, I was alone, with no strong hand of love to guide me, save the wounded Hand always stretched forth in welcome, but which I had all my life rejected. All for me in the future was indeed "spectral and dim." Why could I not say, truthfully, and from my heart, "Save God and our Brother?"

Why might I not clasp close in mine this rejected Hand, and feeling its God-given strength, lean, like Paul, on the arm of our dear Elder Brother?

He was silent while I was thus questioning myself, and we neither of us spoke for some time. His words had raised a great struggle and tempest in my heart. I kept my face turned away from him, so he might not see the tears which were slowly filling my eyes, and which I strove to keep back, but could not.

“Paul,” and I put my hand in his again, “won’t you tell me what to do? I have felt this want; I feel it all the time; I shall feel it more than ever when I am away from you. Won’t you tell me what I must do?”

“Do you wish to be truly a child of this dear Saviour who has borne so much for you, and who is always ready and willing to hear—far more willing than we are to ask?”

I struggled with myself a minute or two; then I said, choking down the sobs:

“Oh, I do, so much, so very much. And yet I always forget it; I have before, and I shall do so again. But tell me what to do, and perhaps, when I am away from you, I shall remember it.”

“Then, above all other things, I would be strict

and prayerful. Make it your rule each morning to ask God's blessing upon the day before you begin it. Thank Him at night that His arm has been about you. Make it your duty and pleasure to set apart some portion of each day to read your Bible and ponder it well."

"How can I?" I interrupted; "I shall go to school, and I shall have my lessons."

"Then take one verse. Surely you can spend time for that. Take one verse each day, and think it over. It will be a comfort to you," he said, and clasping me closer to him, "Oh, Aggie, my sister, if I can only feel that your feet are in the right path! I love you very much; you must know how much; and I can not bear to see you in your fresh young girlhood casting aside all that makes life beautiful here and Heaven certain hereafter. Promise me to-night, Aggie, you will do all this."

"I will," I said, desperately, throwing my arms about him; "I will truly try to be good, Paul; but you must help me."

"God will help you, my sister. You can not doubt Him who has said for our great comfort the blessed words, 'Ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.'"

I looked around me, on the dark, moving waters,

and the bright moonlight gleaming over it; on the long, dusky shore, with the white surf moaning and beating and falling back, with a long dull cry, on the sands at our feet; and I thought, as I once had thought before, it was like eternity, and we two tarrying like waiting souls on its great, mysterious shores. Life looked so little at that moment, and eternity so never-ending and unfathomable.

“I will ask,” I said. “Paul, I will ask so earnestly every day of my life.” And when he leaned over and touched his lips to mine, I felt something like tears on my face; and I wondered if they were for me, or the little sister who was laid under the violets so long ago.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN the cool gray dawn we drove away the next morning.

I rose early, so very early that I had to light my lamp; for, remembering my promise to Paul the night before, I read my chapter and said my prayer. I don't think the prayer amounted to very much, as it was more a yearning, simply expressed, that I might live and be good and come back to Hilton Lee, and always live there, and never go away. I would have added an ardent petition that Paul would never part with the *Scud*, only it seemed rather out of place. But it eased my heart somewhat of the load I had been carrying about with me, and was at all events a beginning.

It looked very dark and gloomy when I came down-stairs to see the big trunks in the hall, and auntie and Jane bustling about like two black-draped nuns, in the spectral light, with their water-proofs on, and no breakfast laid in the great empty

dining-room ; our voices sounding hollow enough in the dismantled house, as we went about talking very hurriedly to one another, and putting the last touches to our toilets, and stuffing forgotten things into the carpet-bags, as people will do at the last moment ; and then the village hack came rattling up to the door, and aunt said, " Upon my word, this is very kind," and Jane said, " Bless me, it's young Mr. Endicott ;" and with eyes filling in spite of themselves, I ran out as Paul jumped from the box, hurrying us in and helping the driver throw up the trunks as if they were feathers, and then bundling us all in—the two dogs, the satchels, and three females, making a sad jumble ; then he let down the glass and banged the door to, saying " good-byes " all the time.

" I remembered my promise, Paul," I found time to say, looking up into his face and winking very hard to keep the tears back.

" That's a good girl "—answering my smile—" don't forget it. Good-bye, my little friend ; Christmas will soon be around. God bless you, and keep us until we meet again."

He kissed me, shook hands with Aunt Martha, and the last thing we saw, as we drove rapidly away, was Paul with hat off waving us good-bye.

"How kind it was of him to get up so early and see us off," commented my aunt, placidly.

"I feel as if we were going to a funeral," I said, bursting into tears. "If everybody hated going home as I do, there'd be precious little traveling." And I leaned back on my cushioned seat, feeling for the moment a Marie Antoinette walking up the guillotine steps, or Marie of Scotland laying her head on the fatal block! What a goose I was, to be sure! Evidently auntie thought so, for after allowing me ample time to redden my eyes most thoroughly, and damage my clean *pique* dress and cotton gloves, she proposed, as we had reached the boat, that I should wipe up and be presentable; which request was instantly complied with, and half an hour after we were breakfasting most rationally on ham and eggs, with a long table full of passengers equally blear-eyed and hungry with ourselves, so that I had the pleasing consciousness that I was not the only one who looked as if the past night had been spent at a wake. And the boat creaked and groaned and tossed up and down, going farther than ever away from the pleasant shores which I felt would hereafter be always home to me, and the engine kept on wheezing and puffing as if it were overtaken by sudden asthma,

each revolution of the wheel widening the distance between me and my friend. To console myself and to please him, I took out my little Bible and read my chapter for the day, coiled up on the easy velvet cushions which ran around a large pillar or brace in the center of the saloon. Aunt had taken out the last new monthly and was finishing a story she had begun. She looked up once, and seeing me thus employed, stooped over and said, "You set me an example, Agatha, my dear," with a smile which went to my heart, for I felt I did not deserve her praise—that I was doing it, not from a sense of duty or innate love of it, but simply to please Paul.

"If I should read the Gospels through before Christmas," I thought, "I wonder what he would say to me then."

I don't think I can ever find words to tell how much I hated that going home, so I'll just leave it to imagination. Any boy or girl who goes back to school after a paradise of a vacation, will understand the depth of my despair, and fill out the vacancy for me. And, feeling it a cross, I took it up desperately, and bore it, thinking of my promise to Paul; and so in some way or another managed to get through the time and gain aunt's

most approving smile besides. It made me very comfortable and happy, and after I once got fairly settled at my books it all went on smoothly enough. It was only a little while to wait, after all; and I found out, as Paul had told me, it left a very happy feeling in one's heart if one tried to do right. The promise made on the sands that moonlight night was not forgotten. I kept up to it pretty regularly, always reading some portion of the Bible morning and evening, although sometimes it was an alarmingly small share. But if I had felt at all like neglecting this duty, his letters would have been an all-sufficient reminder. He wrote me once from the sea-shore; after that his letters dated from the seminary—always the same, cheerful, bright, boyish letters, just like himself, and never failing in each one to drop me a thoughtful word or bit of advice, which lingered in my heart, and would not be put aside.

It was nearing Christmas time, and aunt and I were making great preparations for that festivity. Phil was coming home, and Paul had promised me he too would be with us. I kept myself very much in my own room about this time, locking my door and making my little preparations for the occasion with much secrecy. Aunt had very kindly

given me leave to invite some of my school friends, and Phil was to bring home "one or two of the fellows," as he called them; so altogether the cottage would be quite full during the holiday week, and a good time we hoped to have of it. Every spare moment out of study hours I spent in work, often rising with the dull gray dawn, but not once forgetting my Bible. I had learned to rather like the practice, after nearly three months' trial of it, and sometimes I felt the verses coming into my mind as a great assistance, if I felt troubled or cross, or things went awry, as was very apt to be the case in a school where a hundred odd girls ran riot.

CHAPTER IX.

THE night before Christmas was a busy one for us. Phil came home in the morning train with "two of the fellows," as he had promised, though he was rather disappointed that one must be a "small boy;" for, as he wrote me, "Ned Carter couldn't stir without his brother; and as he wanted Ned, he was forced to bring Jack, too." I took up my station at the window after breakfast, watching for the depot stage, and when I saw it turning the corner of the street, I went out on the porch, and in spite of a light-falling snow, ran out to the gate bareheaded, to welcome them. I hadn't seen my old playfellow in months, and his coming, together with the grand Christmas party which auntie had promised me, was an event in my quiet life.

Long before he got out of the lumbering old vehicle, I heard his "Hurrah, Ag! All right, little woman?" And then jostling and pushing his way out, with the two boys following him, Master

Phil, with a huge paper parcel in his hand, made a descent upon me, kissing me twice, and rumpling my hair all up, in his rapture. Then he presented me to his friends after the most approved boyish fashion, thus: "Here, Ag, hold this bundle for a fellow, will you? Ned—Jack—this is my Cousin Ag." And I looked up, and said, "How do you do?" And the eldest boy took off his cap and made me a nice little bow, and said, "Pretty well, I thank you. I'm Ned, as Phil has forgotten his manners to-day." Then quite gallantly, "Do let me hold these packages for you," as Phil was throwing their worldly goods down from the stage, and piling my arms full, as I stood by his side.

"No you don't!" cried Phil. "I'll take 'em myself, now. Come on, boys"—and catching up all he could conveniently carry, he left me behind with Ned and Jack, and dashed into the house with snow-covered boots, to give the old lady a "jolly good hug," he said.

Jack was a "small boy" indeed, with a round, good-natured, but utterly sheepish little face, and he was evidently too frightened to utter a word while we were walking up the path. Ned was older than Phil, and looked wide-awake. I thought I should like him far better than his shy little

brother ; and as for the girls who were invited to the Christmas party, I knew they'd just go wild over his curly head and big black eyes as full of mischief as ever they could be. We chatted up the path together very pleasantly, and when we entered the parlor, we found Phil on the floor by Aunt Martha's chair, his arm around her waist, while he was filling her ears with more nonsense than she had heard in months. But she bore it all patiently from him. Phil always was auntie's favorite, though I beg to assert I do not set that statement down in any malice aforethought.

It never takes a very long time for boys and girls to get acquainted ; and we had business before us. So after Phil had carried his packages and wrappings up-stairs, and after the boys had made themselves quite splendid with soap and water and Byron collars, and dinner was over, and Phil had ended his long talk with auntie, we went at our work in earnest. She had ordered home a plentiful supply of greens the day before, together with a large, fine tree, and she gave us the dining-room to deck out and litter as much as we pleased ; for I think nothing, not even Phil's entreaties, would have beguiled that most notable housewife into giving us her pretty parlor, with its

velvet carpet and satin furniture; and the dining-room was larger and better suited to our purpose every way, as Phil remarked; and as for our presents, we could put them on the tree the last thing Christmas night, and no one would be the wiser through the day.

Then I sat down to the making of wreaths, while the boys hung them, and put all sorts of fanciful devices in green over the door, and then they brought in the big tree, firmly fastened to a large block of wood, and after covering the base with mosses and leaves, we decked it out with long streamers of parti-colored ribbon, little reflectors, gilt nuts, and tiny candles of every hue and shade. Then where to stand it was the next question.

"I think it would look well in the center of the room," remarked Phil, perched on a high step-ladder, with his feet tucked under him like a tailor, and a pensive air of reflection on his face; "but the table is in the way."

"Push the table back," said I.

"Oh, but we shall need it here to-morrow evening. Auntie says we shall have a fine supper, and there's no place but this for the table," argued Phil.

"Let's put it in the corner," suggested Jack, shyly, and as if he would have enjoyed immensely going with it.

But Ned nipped Jack's little hope in the bud at once :

"It wouldn't show off at all there," he commented. "Put it in the bay-window."

"Good for you," cried Phil, hopping down from his elevation. "We'll do that thing at once, and then can walk around it and see everything. Here goes !"

And the tree was dragged up to the window, and looked very grand there, as Ned had predicted. And by the time we were through with our decorations, we had got tolerably well acquainted, and even Jack had thrown aside some of his bashfulness. I burned with an ardent desire to tell Phil of the pretty comforters which I had knitted for his two friends ; but I wisely kept my own counsel. I would not give Paul a comforter. He was too much of a man to wear such a thing. So I worked a lovely pair of slippers to bestow upon him, if he hadn't forgotten all about his promise. And Aunt Martha had gone with me to select a dressing-case for him besides ; and I had got Phil one exactly like it, and they lay on

my wardrobe shelf, and the door thereof was locked and the key kept safely in my pocket; but I took a peep at them nearly every day, to assure myself the silver tops of the bottles were bright and shining, as well as the plate on the lid, where the names were engraven.

"I think," I said that evening when the boys were gone to the city, to make a few last purchases, "I do think, auntie, Paul will not come. He hasn't written me a word; and what shall I do with his dressing-case?"

"Send it to him," she suggested, serenely.

"Oh, yes! but I do wish he would come. I am so afraid he will not, for he has not written. And auntie, don't you think I ought to give Ned and Jack something more than those little comforters? I've got plenty of money for Christmas, you told me; and wouldn't it be right, and only a proper compliment to Phil's friends?"

"Decidedly proper," she said; "what will you give?"

"There's the trouble," I answered, knitting my brows. "How would books do?"

"But it is too late to buy anything now, Agatha. You should have mentioned it before."

Just then there was a ring at the door, and a

few minutes afterward Jane brought in a small box wrapped in brown paper, marked "private," and directed to "Miss Martha Lee." She smiled as she looked at the writing, and put it aside without examining it; but there was something about it, just seen for an instant, that reminded me of Paul's large, free hand. But I said not a word, only going back to my old distress, "What shall I give the boys, auntie?"

"I am sure I don't know. We'll set about thinking at once;" and then, as if a bright thought had struck her, "How would knives do?"

"Capitally; but we can't get knives any more than books!"

"Oh, yes, we can; leave it to me."

Some way aunt had been wonderfully kind to me ever since we came back from the Lee. I think, too, I tried to please her more, or, perhaps, it was Paul's influence. But be that as it may, I certainly was nearer loving her than I had been in all the years gone before.

"They must be very handsome knives, then," I remarked, after a fit of meditation, "for they will look small, anyway, by the side of the dressing-cases."

"But Ned and Jack are only friends of a day,

and I think it quite as much of a present as you ought to give. Besides, I have something for them."

"Oh, have you? Then we'll do very well. And I've such pretty gifts for the girls, you know."

"I think a Christmas party is very fine," I ruminated, sitting down before the bright grate fire, and thinking it all over again. Aunt went back to her reading by the table, and I kept up my old fashion of dreaming. How much I longed to see Paul! How I wondered if he were coming! I had written him all about our preparations, and begged that he would drop in upon us. He had never written me that his mother had come back to the city, and I wondered if he would come just to see me; and I also wondered, idly looking in the fire, and watching the long forks of flame that leaped up from the blazing coal, if Paul wanted to see me as much as I wanted to see him. I longed to tell him how I had tried to do as he wished, and to ask and receive further advice from him. And then, in spite of my merry anticipations for the morrow, a sober thought came into my heart of what this festival really meant which we were keeping. A memorial of the day on which the little Christ-child was laid in the manger, weak,

helpless—human, divine—“born a child, yet God our King!” It should be kept solemnly, I thought, instead of spending it in dancing and amusement. I wondered how Paul would think it should be kept; I longed to ask him. Aunt Martha had told me it was a happy time, and should be a joyously held festival in all lands; and she gave me such a pretty little book to read, about the Christmas-trees in Germany, and that was the way I came to beg her to give me one, and how she was so quick to grant my request. I thought little German children must have very happy homes, if all I had read of them were true. And it was such a sweet custom to keep up—it was such a sweet song to ring through the world, of “peace and good-will to men.”

How could one feel other than joyous on Christmas-day? And looking into my own heart I saw much more happiness than used to rest there. Jane said I was taming down, and twice that day Phil had asked where all my old fun had gone. What was it coming over my spirit that was changing me so? Was it this peace and good-will which came with the happy Christmas time, or was it Paul's influence and power over me, transforming me more into the likeness of a child whom he

could love? Or was it the love of Christ shining in upon my darkened soul, and filling me with a true desire to be good, which made life seem a brighter thing than it used?

I looked at aunt quietly reading under the soft light of her Argand lamp, and thought our own home was nearly as lovely as those pleasant German homes of which I had been reading. Two years before I almost hated everything in the house, and felt it only a dismal, gloomy place to me. Now it seemed pleasant and home-like, perhaps for the very first time in my life. I looked at the great, ruddy fire, quivering all over with flashes of lambent flame, and thought how cold and still and white all was without, and within how cheerful and warm. The heavy curtains drawn over the windows shut out the cold and the night. The light of lamp and flickering fire-gleam sent all the shadows fleeing away. Home, as never before, seemed a happy resting-place for my unquiet little soul. I thought I had been ungrateful to aunt. I had never scarcely given her a kind thought or word in return for all her care of me; but I would set about it that very night. I would begin the New Year, so close at hand, with far different feelings than I had ever begun it before.

I had been trying in my own strength too long—now I would try in the Master's, as Paul had told me. I would begin the New Year aright. I would ask God's blessing upon it that very Christmas night. There could be no more fit time.

"Agatha," said Aunt Martha, laying aside her book, and breaking in upon my reverie, "are you dreaming over the Christmas party yet?"

I started and gathered together my scattered thoughts. Over the sea, at other little festive gatherings like that which we hoped the morrow would bring for us—to Paul—to the sweet Christmas carols that children were singing here, as in other lands. How my thoughts had been flying hither and thither, like birds of passage, between other worlds and this little one of home.

I said, "No, aunt," quite gravely, and looking into the fire again with all my might. "I was thinking of so many things, I hardly know which to tell you first. But I think to-night my heart is more full of Christmas peace than Christmas parties. Aunt, do you know I am very sorry I have been such a care and trial to you all my life."

She started with surprise as I spoke thus, and then said very soberly, "You have been a care to me, and sometimes, I suppose, a trial; but lately,

Agatha, I think you have tried to be a different girl, and I am more rejoiced than I can tell you that it is so. I can safely say you are a comfort to me now, and I look forward to a happy, pleasant life with you in the years to come."

"Paul made me promise to be good," I answered, in a low voice, the blood rushing over my face as I spoke, "and I have tried so hard to be so for his sake. I wanted his praise—I wanted his affection—but do you know, to-night, aunt, I think I have been all wrong, and I shall only have to begin over again. I think I must try not so much in my own strength, as in the strength of Jesus. I am all wrong. Don't you think I am?"

"I think one can never be very far from right," she said kindly, "when one feels as you do to-night, Agatha. I think perhaps you are nearer Him than you ever were before."

CHAPTER X.

CHRISTMAS morning dawned at last. We heard the bells ringing out merry chimes from the great Cathedral tower in the city, faint and soft, like pealing, far-off fairy bells; and yet so clear and sweet that it woke me, too, in the cold, gray dawn, and I sat up in bed and listened, until my heart longed to join in the glad cry of "Unto us a Child is born; unto us a Son is given."

I got up and looked out of the window. The icicles hung dripping over the panes in long, crystal pendants, and the ground was white with newly-fallen snow. Hurrying along the streets were groups of dark figures, men and women going on into the town while it was yet dark to see the new-born Saviour laid in the manger, and to live over again in spirit that blessed birthday which dawned for the great universal world eighteen hundred years ago. After all, one could not laugh at their devotion or eagerness to see

the little waxen doll, which was to them a representation of Christ their King. It was a sweet old custom to thus adore their Lord. I did not believe in doing it myself, *that* way; but there was another. There was no reason why I, a Protestant child, should not reverently bow before the great All-Father, and thank Him for the gift of His dear Son. I knelt there, right in the window, with the gilded cross of the great Cathedral spire showing dimly through the mists of early morning, and looking upon it as the only spar to which I could cling, I prayed, perhaps as never before in my life, so earnestly and solemnly that a blessing might be given me—even unto me—for the sake of this dear Son, who laid down His kingly crown, and took upon Himself the nature of a poor child of earth, for our endless comfort and salvation. Somehow when I had ended my petitions, the cross seemed to come out from the shadows and shine for me more clearly, and Paul's words whispered themselves over again in my heart, "Ask and ye shall receive." And then, through the dim haze, one little ray of the uprising sun just flashed and rested upon the huge gilded emblem of our faith, as well as of the worshipers gathered below; and I took it for a sign, a good omen to me,

that some day over my darkened soul the night-shadows would flee away, and God's blessed sunlight rest there, as upon this cross uplifted high on which my eyes were fixed.

I had never such a happy beginning of any Christmas-day before. I went back to my little table, and dressing hastily, took up my Bible, and read all the gracious promises concerning this coming of our King, and the great names He should bear—"Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace"—and then folding my hands over the page, I cried with the words of the prophet stirring my heart, "Ah, Lord God, behold I can not speak, for I am a child!" and the gracious answer, "I am with thee to deliver thee," I felt was given to me, as to him, if I but kept in the right way.

All these things sobered yet made me very happy, and when the bell rang for breakfast, I was so wrapped in my thoughts that I came down with a very preoccupied air, and forgot to say "Merry Christmas" until Phil, who was concealed behind the door, dashed out, and with one fell swoop bore down upon me, with a boisterous cry of "Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas, Ag! Where are your wits?—wool gathering, eh? Don't you know

it is Christmas-day?" And then a great chase we had through the house, making it ring with Christmas greetings, and bringing the boys and Aunt Martha down to the breakfast-room to see what mad frolic was going on.

"Aggie was putting on airs," Phil exclaimed, "and making believe she was a grown-up young woman, and too old to play at Christmas romps. Do you know, auntie, she absolutely forgot to 'wish me,' as we used to say, though she caught me behind the door, where I had hidden for the express purpose."

"There have been lots of little ragamuffins under my window," said Ned, "wishing me 'Merry Christmas *for a cent!*'"

"Did you give it to them?"

"Of course I did. It was real fun to toss out the pennies in the snow, and watch them digging into it with their dirty little hands; and then such a shout as they would set up if they found it!"

"I think Christmas-day is good fun," said Phil, pensively buttering his buckwheats. "It's so much nicer to be here than at school. Isn't it, Jack?"

Jack gave a smothered "yes," which sounded as

if he were choked with Christmas "fixins" in advance, and then retired permanently behind his coffee-cup. He was the most pitiable little specimen of shyness I had ever seen, and his big brother Ned was just the reverse. Phil and he kept up an animated conversation, intermixed with suppressed bursts of laughter, and communications of apparently immense importance, and didn't seem to notice this little innocent at all. So, as my heart was full of all manner of good resolutions, I just devoted myself to Jack, and felt I was really very self-sacrificing and kind. And when I went down to the parlor, looking quite the "mistress of Hilton Lee," as Jane foolishly told me, I scarcely knew myself for the same doubting, fearing child, who waited for the sunshine to gild the cross in the dusky gloom of that breaking day. I felt more fine than ever when I found myself alone in the room, now quite dazzling and elegant with the chandeliers both lighted, and I danced up and down before the long mirror, and thought nothing could be finer than parties and money, and then quite lost in admiration of the unusually beautiful vision in the glass, I went on enlarging my castle, dreaming of the time when I should give grander and more elegant fêtes than this in a home of my own, and be

a woman grown. It would only be a few years. Oh, how I longed for the time to come. Life looked very fair and bright to me, now that my ship was safely come home to me from over the seas. I felt that all the world lay before me, and to my ignorant sight it seemed a mere nothing for me to place my feet upon, and cleave out any path I chose—a very different thing from the work-a-day life of most young girls. An enchanted land was it to me, into which I already tried to stray in imagination, and as I looked at myself in the glass, my cheeks burned and my eyes danced with eagerness to begin the battle of life in earnest. I was so lost in the might of this great thought—riches, grandeur, fine dress, and unusual display—that I never heard the door swing softly open, and a footstep that I was longing to hear, fall noiselessly on the thick carpet.

“It is a great thing to be rich,” I said aloud, smoothing down the ruffles of my pink silk. “Oh, such a fine, fine thing to be rich !”

“Is this my little friend of the beach ?” asked a kind, grave voice. And there, looking in the glass, close by my side, stood Paul—my real, flesh and blood, veritable Paul, and no trick of the beguiling mirror !

With a cry of delight I seized both his hands and drew him away from the glass. I forgot that he must have seen me in my vain, delighted indulgence of pride; I forgot everything but that he was here!

"The very same Captain Paul," I cried. "He has not changed a bit, and he has kept his promise, as he always used. Oh, how glad, how very glad I am!"

He smiled down upon me, smoothing back my hair, and saying with his old fondness:

"Yes, I have not forgotten I was to play an important part in this great first party. But tell me, for I don't quite know my little friend in all this grandeur, can it really be the same little brown Gipsy who ate clams on the beach with me one summer day, and with her own hands pulled them from the ashes? I don't know her at all."

"Oh, but it is the very same," I cried, clapping my hands, upon which, for the first time in my life, Jane had drawn a pair of white kid gloves.

"I am glad," he said gravely. "I thought she was lost to me forever, and Miss Agatha Lee, a worldly-wise heiress, had stepped into her place. I am glad I was deceived."

"But you were not," I said repentantly, a

crimson flush of shame dyeing my cheeks and brow, when I remembered how he had found me, and how very likely he had heard my thoughts, which were spoken aloud. "You were not deceived, dear Paul! I have forgotten myself, and am lost in my old vanity and worldliness," and I burst into vexed tears. "I told you how it would be! Come, and take me out again, Paul, for I must always be Pliable, and you will be forever taking me out of Despond!"

I dropped down upon a seat at his feet, just as I used to do in that pleasant by-gone summer, when I took him for teacher and guide in all things, and leaning my head upon my hands, I burst into one of my passionate fits of weeping. Into my heart all the sorrow of a wasted three months was gathered. I had tried so hard to do right—to *please Paul*—to show him when I met him again, how many steps I had taken toward the Wicket; and here was the end of it! That he of all others should catch me in such an absorbed state of vain-glory and pride! For a little while he let me sob out all my shame there alone, while he walked up and down the room. I did not dare look up or speak. I forgot my silk dress and white gloves. I forgot that it was nearly time for

the company to arrive, and my eyes would be red and my nose damaged. I only knew that Paul had come, and was disappointed in me. It was a very hard thought.

Finally he stopped his walk; came back to me and sat down by my side, quietly taking my hand in his, and drawing me to him.

"Do not cry any more," he said, in his old, kind way. "I am more glad than I can tell you to get my little sister back again."

"And I am so glad you are come," I sobbed; "only I had hoped to tell you such good things of myself. I have tried so hard, I had hoped you would be pleased."

And this was the bitterest thought of all, that I had failed to please him.

"Did you forget what I told you about trying in your own strength?" he asked tenderly.

"I thought of it this morning when I heard the chimes," I whispered, "and remembered what the bells were ringing for."

"But you forgot it again to-night? You forgot all the poverty and lowliness of His birth; you were only glad that you were rich! You did not think of the King who laid down His crown, and became, for your sake as well as mine, very poor.

You did not think to ask Him for strength, who died to save you ! ”

“ I told you how it would be ! ” I acknowledged desperately. “ I had indeed forgotten it all.”

“ Then you have only to try again,” he said in his old kind way. “ Our whole life, no matter how much we try, can only be one long succession of failures. But we are forgiven if we ask in His name, even more than the seventy times seven with which we are commanded to forgive our brother. And now we must dry these eyes, and smooth these disordered curls. I am afraid you will hardly be the fine lady you were a half hour ago, to receive your guests.”

I looked up appealingly, and he went on :

“ Besides, I want to be very merry with you all to-night, and we must not spoil the pleasure of this first party. Run away now, and we will have our good long talk another time.”

“ But you will not be here to-morrow,” I said, trying to choke down my sobs, “ and I can never get along without you to direct me.”

“ Yes, you can, if you try not so much to please Paul, and more to please God.”

“ I know,” I said, repentantly, “ I thought last night—and told auntie so—that I was all wrong,

and only had to begin over again. I have been all this while trying to be good for your sake, and because of my promise to you, when I might have known I would fail."

"If you would only govern every action and simple thought by three little words, Aggie."

"What are they?" I asked.

"'For Jesus' sake.' Say them over to yourself when you want to deny yourself any selfish pleasure, when you curb your hasty temper, or check the thoughtless words upon your lips; only say it softly over in your heart, and you will find yourself strong to overcome almost any temptation and evil. But we must finish this talk some other time, sister mine. Go away now, and make yourself 'Miss Lee' again."

"Don't!" and I put up my hand beseechingly. "Don't say that, or I won't have any heart to greet a soul."

"But you must—and that reminds me, you haven't given me my Christmas greeting. Come, Agatha, a Merry Christmas to you, and a Happy New Year, and may God give you strength and grace to spend the opening year in His service."

I clasped my arms around his neck, and gave "a Merry Christmas" in return for his.

"Is there anything wrong in a party?" I asked timidly, for I longed to have my doubts settled. "Is there anything wrong in being gay, and in having a tree loaded full of presents upon this day?"

"Not to my way of thinking," he said. "You shall see me as merry as if I were ten, if you will only put some smiles upon your own face, and be happy and enjoy everything that is right and reasonable for you to enjoy; but, remember, for all this pleasure, for all these good gifts, there is but One to whom you may present the thank-offering."

"And you will come to-morrow, dear Paul," I entreated, "and begin right here, where we leave off to-night, and you will tell me wherein I have failed, and how I may be better."

"We will talk it all over then," he said, kissing my cheek; and so I ran up to my own room, and greatly dismayed Jane by throwing off my soiled gloves, and resolving to go without any; then bathing my eyes, and giving a little brush to my disordered hair, I went down the stairs just as I saw the hall-door opening, and a bevy of young boys and girls entering the parlor.

CHAPTER XI.

IT was nearly an hour after this before I could get around by Paul's side, and slip my hand into his. He was talking to Aunt Martha very earnestly, and Phil was standing by his side, apparently as much interested as even I could have desired him to be. "That Paul," as he had contemptuously called him, was giving a most animated description of a pull in a shell-boat between the two rival factions which always exist in college, and Phil was listening with the most absorbed face in the world, for he had all my love of the water and boating generally. Paul looked up when he felt my hand in his, and stopped to tell me the *Scud* was being overhauled, and having a fine new coat of paint; and just then little Jack came up in the most timid and beseeching manner to remind me of my promise, and "there had been two games, and I had forgotten all about it, he knew," and Aunt Martha, turning around on her stool,

struck up a lively tune, and the boys and girls began "sides" again.

"Don't bother, Jack," I said, "I'll go in a moment." And Jack slunk away as if he had committed an enormity in reminding me.

"I must play, I suppose," I whispered to Paul; "I promised little Jack I would choose him, but I am so sorry. I would much rather stay here by you."

"By no means," he answered quickly. "Let me see you with the others, and wearing just as bright a face as they do. And the poor little boy looks just now like an escaped convict. What is the matter?"

"She is such a goose," said Phil. "She promised to play with him because he was afraid no one would notice him, and he felt very badly about it, and Ag was sorry for him. Wasn't she silly, Mr. Endicott?"

"I think she was very nice," said Paul, patting my head, "and I think she forgot herself when she said to her guest a minute ago, 'don't bother,'—didn't she?"

Aye! just as she was always forgetting herself; and I dashed away with my usual impulse, caught the hapless Jack, who had retired from the world

behind a high-backed chair, and dashed him into the game before he really knew what I was about.

"I didn't mean any harm, Jack," I whispered, "when I sent you away ; pray forgive me," and, rosy with smiles, he and I soon forgot all the temporary blights of the evening. And then there was another game directly that one was finished, which Ned and I carried on in unparalleled style, we thought ; and soon after Paul and Phil disappeared, and when this was ended, a great hush and expectancy fell on each one as auntie rose, and at a given signal from some one within, she threw open the folding doors between the hall and dining-room, and the great tree standing in the bay-window, glittering with presents, and one blaze of light, was displayed to our view. Paul and Phil stood each side of it, and then my aunt requested us all to walk into the room, and receive our presents.

There was no use in trying to walk in dignified couples, two and two, like fine grown-up ladies and gentlemen, but all dashed in, helter skelter, in the most promiscuous manner, and such a chatter and chorus of voices arose that for a few minutes it was a miniature Babel indeed. And after all, the good nature with which we elbowed, and jostled, and stepped on one another's toes, was quite as

pleasant as if we had attempted older airs and graces, though Paul did threaten us with the Riot Act.

Every one, girl as well as boy, had a present to receive from Paul's hand, which he gave with some pleasant little words, while Phil busied himself with stripping the tree, and handing the various gifts to him. All were marked with the name of the recipient, and "From Agatha Lee with a Merry Christmas." Truly auntie had done my work well! After all, the thought would come exultingly—it was a very fine thing to be rich! I felt like a Lady Bountiful indeed as each gave me an opinion of his or her gift.

"Now, you little darling!" said one, "you knew I wanted that reticule; you heard me tell Fan the other day mamma would not give me one." And "You're too lovely for anything, Aggie!" broke in another; "nothing could have pleased me more than this fan." "Do let me get at her," chimed in a third; "how could you possibly know I wanted this?"

"A little bird whispered it to me," I said, with the air of a Princessa.

"The praise of the world is very sweet," said Paul, dryly, at my elbow.

I started and blushed, and for the second time that evening felt a keen pang of shame. I almost wished he had not come to spoil my pleasure that way, and then hastily and confusedly remembering how plainly he could read all my thoughts in my tell-tale face, I stooped over one of the girls, pretending to arrange her sash, but before I could say a word he was back by Phil's side again, opening the dressing-case, which auntie handed him in my name. He looked, then turned around with real pleasure flushing his face, and began to join his thanks with the others.

"Do withhold yours," I said, trying to speak coldly; "the praise of the world is too intoxicating by far, Paul!"

Now I suppose some evil spirit was hovering about me, tempting me to this speech, for it was furthest from my heart to wound him; above all others in the world I cared most for pleasing him—but in an utterly unaccountable manner the words popped into my mind, and I said them. The instant they were spoken I regretted it.

"The little sister I buried so long ago would never have spoken to me like that," he said, bending over his case, pretending to arrange its contents, and not looking up at me again.

I could have burst into tears over the trick my unhappy temper was forever playing me, but something—an undefined spirit of opposition, suddenly made me turn to Ned, who was whispering thanks for his gift, and then in a few minutes we discovered that Paul had started a fine game of “Stage Coach,” and we went with the others to beg a seat inside; and from “Stage Coach” it went on to “Blind Man’s Buff,” and to “Forfeits,” which were made particularly funny with Paul for judge; and by the time supper was announced, all were pretty well acquainted with Mr. Endicott; and Ned declared he was a “perfect brick,” if he was going to be a clergyman; and Phil had been made quite happy by sundry promises of free sailing in the *Scud* the following summer. As for me, I had not spoken to my well-beloved friend since my unlucky answer to his thanks. He came up to me with an ice, and wanted to know very gravely, but with laughter in his eye, “if I could tell him where he might find little Aggie Lee.”

“In the old place,” I said, taking the plate he offered me, and feeling the deepest sense of humiliation. “She is in Despond again, Paul, but she will try and come out safely.”

“And she will always come out safely,” he

whispered, "if she will find the right hand to lead her."

And then with one of his most encouraging smiles, he left me to answer Aunt Martha's call.

I never quite remember how we got through the rest of that evening. I was giddy and faint with the unusual excitement, the heat, and the noise, and I saw only the crowd of merry boys and girls; heard the music crashing, and the lights going round and round, and then suddenly they were all dashed out, and in the great darkness I stretched out both hands, crying, "Paul," and fell to the floor. And when I opened my eyes again, the house was still; my hands and face felt wet and cold, and I lay on my own bed in my own room, and aunt and Paul stood over me. There was a sickly smell of camphor on my handkerchief, and when I tried to raise my head, I felt giddy and faint again.

"What has happened?" I asked. "Where are the girls?" And then relapsing into worldly anxieties, "Auntie, my dress will be 'done spoiled,' as Rosy says."

"Never mind your dress, Pussy. Do you feel better now?"

"What was the matter with me?" I asked; and Paul, stooping down, kissed my forehead, and said, "Poor little thing. I think to-day has been too much for her," and was going to leave the room when I called him back.

"Stay," I said, "Paul, until I ask you one question. Do you think you can ever love me as well as you used, after to-night?"

"Better, I fancy," he said, "little sister. Why?"

But I answered his question only by asking another:

"You told me once to pray for you, Paul. Won't you pray for me, instead? I need it—indeed I do!"

"And I always remember my little sister, then," he whispered kindly, "if at no other time. May I come to-morrow, Miss Lee, if Aggie is better?"

"Aggie will be quite well, I hope, by to-morrow," Aunt Martha answered, "and we shall all want to see you." And I turned my face toward the wall, and shut my eyes, and the hot tears which I could not keep back, slowly trickled down my cheek; and Paul leaning over me, kissed them softly away, saying, "Good-night;" and when he was gone, Jane came in, and very gently took off

the famous pink silk and hung it away; "and quite a spectacle to behold, it was," she lamented; and then I was so tired, I was glad to lay my head back upon my pillow and sink into troubled dreams.

CHAPTER XII.

AGGIE certainly *was* better the next morning, as Aunt Martha prophesied, and a good laugh did I have over my delicate nerves while Jane was dressing my hair. I didn't feel well, though, when we had ended the hair-dressing and our confidential little chat about the party. I had made Jane very happy, too, with a fine new gown, the exact shade of maroon she most ardently admired, so we were very good friends that morning, and she created an unusual amount of ringlets in contradistinction to the very scant pattern of the day before. I was tired when she had ended, though I did not feel badly enough to keep my room, and when the breakfast-bell sounded I put a shawl about my shoulders, and went down. I was a little giddy at first, and it seemed as if the floors were taking a slow waltz with the walls and ceilings as I walked. I got in the hall, when I remembered my Bible, and turned back. I couldn't manage the chapter very well with my weak head,

so I just opened it anywhere, and read as Paul had bidden me, one verse; and it happened to be this :

“For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death.”

And then I put back the Book in its place, and went down to breakfast, thinking over my verse as I walked along. Paul had said truly, one verse gave me enough to think over.

“You didn’t see your presents last night, Ag,” said Phil, as we gathered around the table. “You were too busy giving us ours.”

“And too sick to enjoy it, if you had seen them,” said Jack, with the utmost sympathy in his little face. “I’m real sorry you fainted away.”

“It didn’t hurt me,” I answered. “I think I shall be all right after breakfast.”

“We had an elegant time!” remarked Ned, with slow enjoyment, sipping his coffee. “I say, Phil, it’s rather rough on a fellow now to go back to school.”

“Decidedly rough,” Phil agreed, and then, as I didn’t feel like leaving my seat, Phil proposed my presents should be brought to me.

“If the mountain wouldn’t come to Mahomet,

you know," laughed Ned, as he went up to the bay-window with Phil, and presently both came back with hands well filled.

"Such a display!" Ned declared. "It was only fair, however, that I should have something myself, who had given away so much," as he handed me first of all Aunt Martha's gift. It was just like her! An exquisite little Bible, bound in blue velvet, with gilt clasps and edges, and my name on the outside in tiny gilt letters.

"It was just what I wanted, only much too fine for every-day use, auntie," I said.

Nevertheless she would like to see it on my dressing-table, and know that I read it every day.

"I have watched you some time, my dear," she went on smilingly, "and I think you deserve this."

"I don't deserve anything!" I answered under my breath. "Oh, auntie," thinking of the verse which I had been lingering over in thought, "what good has my Bible-reading done me?"

My eyes were filling with tears, which little Jack saw, and skillfully sought to divert my mind.

"Show her our present, Ned," he said; then in an ecstatic *aside* to me, "Oh, it's lovely, Aggie!"

"Here it is," said Ned. "Only the third of it is mine, for we three—Phil, Jack, and I—put all

our capital together, and made a 'big thing' of it, Jack thinks."

It certainly was a big thing, all gilt and glass on a marble slab, with a little pearl shell in the center like a basin, into which, he explained, I was to drop my jewels (I thought, with a solemn chuckle, of my one carnelian ring, and resolved I'd try the effect that very night); and then on each side, in dainty wicker stands of silver gilt, stood richly-cut bottles. "We did the thing up brown," explained Phil; "we put cologne in one, and bay-rum in the other."

"That was Jack," confessed Ned, blushing a little. "You might know it was Jack; that was his part of the present. We wanted him to get 'Lubin,' but he wouldn't do it; he said it cost too much!"

Jack looked as if he would particularly have enjoyed going through the floor that minute, but he said in a voice which was unmistakably tremulous: "It was only because I wanted to divide and give Miss Lee a new Hymn-book, and I couldn't do both."

"And very kind it was, Jack," said Aunt Martha warmly. "I shall like the little book very much, for mine is quite shabby, and prize it all the

more since I know it required some self-denial to purchase it."

Then Ned had all sorts of odd little gifts from the girls to show me. There was nothing of much value, yet each one had hung some little remembrance on the tree for me; and it was very pleasant looking them over with the boys, and Aunt Martha too; and putting in remarks occasionally, with notes of admiration as well as interrogation. They came to the end finally, and there was nothing from Paul! I didn't want a present, *for the sake of the present*, I said to myself, my eyes filling with tears. I only wanted his remembrance; but I deserved to be neglected.

And then Phil cried out, "Oh, we forgot Mr. Endicott! Ag, he—" and then at a look from Aunt Martha, stopped.

"When Aggie goes into the parlor," she said, "she will see her friend has not forgotten her."

And then I could hardly wait for prayers to be over that I might go and see what Paul had left for me, and, although I tried to settle my thoughts upon the reading, and the prayers which followed it, I found when it was ended I had as usual to reproach myself with inattention. And then, escorted by the boys, and bundled up in my shawl,

I went on into the parlor, which Jane had already restored to its usual order, and looked around.

"She don't see it!" said Phil, delightedly.
"She don't see it at all!"

I thought it would be a book—possibly a Bible—so I looked quickly at the tables; no, there was nothing new there. I walked up to the mirror, and laughed as I caught a glimpse of myself in it, when I thought of last evening. The pink silk dress was not more changed than I. I was pale; dark rings lay about my eyes and mouth, and I was ready to cry at any moment, and I turned away, about to say I should give up the search, when my eye met Paul's—not his own, veritable, trusty blue eyes, changing from grave scrutiny to merry mood—but wearing the tender, loving expression I liked best of all others to see resting there. I started quickly—it seemed so like his real presence with me—then I sat down on the floor, and looked at it admiringly. It stood on the marble pier below the mirror (did he think I would find it *there* more readily than in any other place?), in a sort of frame-like easel, with a dark velvet casing around the face. It was just the head and shoulders, painted exquisitely on porcelain. I didn't utter the thought of my heart

that first time I saw him, "He is like Alcibiades." I simply said, "It is Paul," and was very happy. And then I wondered how he could have given it to me, when I had been so cold and thoughtless the night before, and wounded him, I knew, so deeply. I looked into the tranquil face, wearing its old, serene smile, and it almost seemed to say to me, "I love you now more than ever, little sister." "Yes he was kind and forgiving, and he would come and see me to-night," I said, "and I would tell him all my perplexities, and he would clear up the doubts which beset my path, and put me upon the right road again." Yes, I could afford to wait now, for hereafter I would always have him near me, and it was the next best thing to hearing him speak to look into the frank, loving face, and always meet the same welcoming smile. Yes, Paul's was a gift indeed, and who but he would have thought of it?

That day aunt, Jane, and the boys were unusually kind to me, but I found myself longing many times for night and Paul to come. I could not some way get back into feeling well and bright as I had felt before the party. I had really never been sick in my life, so I bore with ill-disguised impatience the nervous pain about my head, and

the listless feeling which I had not been able to rid myself of since my fainting the night before. Aunt said the unusual excitement had been too much for me, and advised rest, and then, as I had predicted, went into the Rip Van Winkle state immediately after the duties of the morning and a luncheon were disposed of. All three of the boys went off to try the sleighing, and left me alone—to sleep, as they supposed ; for I was curled up very comfortably on a lounge in one end of the dining-room, before the grate fire, with a soft pillow under my head, and a gorgeous afghan over my feet, and as I was told to rest and I would certainly feel better, I closed my eyes and tried to sleep. Then presently Aunt Martha stole away, and the boys soon after, and I was left alone. I felt just weak and lonely enough to lie there, shedding the tears I had been fighting back all the morning, until from very weariness I fell asleep.

I must have slept some time, for when I woke the room was quite full of pleasant twilight, and the fire in the grate was throwing out bright gleams, and showed me the old cat very comfortably located on my feet, purring intense satisfaction. I lay there quietly listening to her sleepy voice, and to the ticking of the clock, and then I became

vaguely conscious I had other company than Miss Puss and the monotonous old clock. I felt, rather than saw, that somebody was sitting near me, and I stretched out my hand, knowing there was but one who would clasp it. "Oh, Paul," I said, "I am so glad you are come."

A fat, chubby little hand was instantly thrust into mine, and a most plaintive voice cried, "I am Jack, please, and not Paul. I have been sitting by you ever since you went to sleep, and you threw your arms and talked so much that I was afraid you were sick, and I sat here to cover you up."

I rubbed my eyes, and looked around me in the greatest state of amazement and disappointment. Yea, verily, it was little Jack, quite lost in the depths of an arm-chair, and patiently bent upon developing his powers as nurse.

"It was very kind of you, Jack, to care for me so well; but why didn't you go with the boys?"

"Well, they thought Frank Gay would be glad of my seat."

"That was very unkind of them, Jack," I said, severely.

"No, not unkind, for I didn't care much to go; my head aches, too."

"Does your head ache?" I asked carelessly; "mine has all day."

"Oh, yes, and my throat is sore, too. I don't feel well," he whispered.

"We both took cold, I guess, Jack, because we played so much and got so very warm; you see it won't do for us to be so very gay in a long time again."

"I wish I was home with grandma," he said, "if it wasn't so far to go."

"Why, you poor little fellow," taking his hand in mine, "don't get homesick now. You know you are to go home for the long vacation."

"I wish I could go home to-morrow," he said. "I *do* want to go to-morrow, Aggie."

"Well, put your head here on half my pillow, and we'll talk about it when Ned comes home. They'll be here very soon, now."

And laying his head by mine, we clasped hands and grew quite confidential in the fast increasing darkness, and I flattered myself I had talked him into feeling much better, when the whole family, aunt, boys, and dogs, came trooping in, and a warm, cosy-spread table soon beguiled Jack and me into forgetting our woes. But I noticed the

poor boy ate very little, and seemed to swallow with much difficulty.

"I don't think you are well, Jack," Aunt Martha said, observing the same thing, and speaking very kindly. "You have eaten a mere nothing, my dear, and I am sure you are not feeling quite right."

Ned laughed gayly, and declared Christmas festivals were too much for Jack. "Next time he would have to stay at home."

"I wish I were home," sighed little Jack to me, never dreaming home and a father's care were so near; never dreaming it was only a few days' journey for his tender, untried feet, and before the new year dawned he would have found and safely reached it. We did not any of us feel the chill of apprehension. We were all somewhat tired and worn, and when Ned proposed his brother's going up to bed at once, he went; but, as he left the room, he stopped by the lounge where I had thrown myself again.

"Good-night, Aggie," he said, timidly. "I should like to kiss you good-night if you would not mind."

And when I put my arms around him, and drew

him down to me, his lips and cheeks were like coals of fire.

"Jack is really sick," I said. "Auntie, do come here right away."

Thoroughly alarmed, she came and took both his hands in hers, asking how long he had felt badly, and if his head ached.

"He is always having headaches," said Ned. "It's nothing, Miss Lee. I'll take him up to bed; you need not mind."

But Aunt Martha did not rest satisfied with Ned's assurance. She went up as soon as she thought him gone to bed, and stayed a long time. When she came down, her face was quite grave and serious.

"Jack is a sick boy, I am afraid," she said. "I shall send Phil for the doctor at once, and I shall go up and sit with him until he comes. Do you want anything, Agatha?"

"Oh, no, auntie. Perhaps Paul will be in soon."

"Yes, dear," she said, absently, and then "poor little Jack," as she went up-stairs again.

By and by Paul did come. He came in just as he used at the Lee, throwing his hat and gloves upon the table, and bringing with him such a

sense of brightness and happiness that I felt more than half well already.

"I have been thinking of you all day," he said, "and fearing you would be ill. Where is Miss Lee?"

And when I told him of Jack, his face grew quite grave. "Poor little fellow," he said, and, as I attempted to rise, he came over to my sofa, and would play physician to me, "or I would be like little Jack," he said, as he drew up the big arm-chair, and sat down by me, taking my hand in his.

"Oh, Paul," I exclaimed, "how can you be good to me, when I was so unkind to you last night? I didn't need your reproof to make me thoroughly wretched all the rest of the evening, and to-day too."

"I can forget," he answered, "because I know my little friend did not intend to wound me; don't speak of it again."

"But I must. Your beautiful gift has made it all the more hard for me. When I went in the parlor and saw it for the first time this morning, your eyes looked nothing but reproach to me."

"And I meant they should be all love," he replied, gayly. "You like it then?"

"Oh, so very, very much! I shall keep it in

my own room, Paul, on my table, where it will be looking reproofs at me continually, and it may keep me a little better. I know I would be better if I had you all the time."

"That is just the thing I want to talk to you about to-night. I want you to put aside entirely this idea of pleasing me. There is One"—and his voice was quite tender and grave—"whom it is far better to please. Try it. Sometimes in writing to me, you say, when you are tempted to do wrong or be neglectful of your duties, you have only to think 'for Paul's sake,' and it instantly becomes easy. Now try another plan. Say 'for Jesus' sake.' I am sure it would make you happier."

I blushed, feeling his reproof deeply, but saying not a word.

"I love you well," he went on in his kind, gentle way, "but I love this dear Elder Brother so much more, and His arm is so strong to lean upon, that I long to have you feel the same support."

"I have asked," I said; "I have asked so many times, but I have received no answer. I have knocked again and again, but the door is always closed to me."

"There is something wrong with you, then, my child; the promise is clear if you do but faithfully, earnestly ask, and in the right spirit. Do not be satisfied with one asking—earnest, *importunate* prayer is the kind we are directed to use. Look upon your Saviour as your best and nearest friend; talk to Him as if He were your brother indeed; tell Him all your heart; tell Him all your little shortcomings and trivial wants, and you will find in such sweet communion with Him at last the rest and peace for which you are longing."

I hid my face in my hands, never looking up at him.

"It troubles me," he said, "that I must go away and leave you so soon. There are so many things when we are together that I can say, and when we are separated that I can not write. And I do long so very much to have you find this Hand, which, all unconsciously, has been leading you for many years. When you can clasp it close, how the darkness and shadows will flee away from your soul. How bright and clear the promises will shine for you, and of how little worth this world, its pleasures and riches, will seem. But you can only find it through love—the love of Christ, the Crucified."

"But you do help me," I whispered.

"I long to help you so much. I long to have you put on the pilgrim's garb, and set out for the Celestial City, more than I can tell you. But there is but one way. He that climbeth up any other, 'the same is a thief and a robber.'"

"It seems easy," I said, "when you are here to tell me, but when you are gone and I begin, I find myself wondering if you would smile approval, and then, you know, Paul, how it ends."

"But it can not end in any other way than right if you do but try my plan. Try it faithfully, with your heart in it, and let me know how you succeed."

"I will try," I promised.

"You are not the only one who is fighting Apollyon," he said, soberly. "I am going through a warfare with him too."

"You?" I cried in surprise. "Oh, Paul! What have you to fight against?"

He sat still a long time, looking into the fire and lost in thought.

"You know what the dream of my life has been?" he asked.

"Yes, and at first how unreconciled I was to it. It seemed so horrible to me then, to have you bury

yourself in that way; but I do not feel so any longer. I am glad, dear Paul, you are to preach this Christ crucified. I shall love to listen to you."

"It is not that," he said softly, with his eyes full of kindly light. "It is not that at all. You will probably never hear me preach, as you say, except the sermons—and very dry, dusty ones they are too—which I sometimes am obliged to give one solitary little hearer. I want to put that all away, Aggie. I am afraid there was some pride in that longing. Now I want to give it up."

"To give it up!" I echoed, astonished. "You can not mean it! You, who since you were old enough to choose, have had but one thought and aim in life! And your mother, and her pride of you in your choice! You are crazy, Paul!"

"You do not understand me," he said, "and I did not understand myself for a long time. Now I know myself. I have fought out the battle with pride. Now I can say, and from my heart, I want to go away to preach this Christ, and the story of the Cross indeed; but not to those who have heard it all their lives; not for money and the applause of the world, and the position I might yet reach; but to tell it in heathen lands, as God has bidden

us tell it—to every creature; to hold the cross before the darkened vision of those who, though they are blind, yet may see. Ah! little Agatha, to be a *laborer* indeed in the vineyard of the Lord.”

“Paul! Paul!” stopping him in dismay, “you will never leave home and friends, and your mother, Paul? It will break her heart.”

“‘Whoso loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me,’” he said slowly, looking, not into my eyes, but past and beyond them, as if the light that he had striven all his life to reach were still beckoning him on.

“And you can serve your Master here,” I went on, without noticing his words. “There is a field, wide and large, at home.”

“And so many laborers in the vineyard,” he answered, “and there so few. No, Agatha, I have had a hard fight, but I see my way now. Under all my pride and weakness, and love of ease, the path over the seas always shone plain and straight to view. I would have shut my eyes to it, but I could not. I would have dulled my ears to the call, but I still heard the same command: ‘Go preach the Gospel!’ and now I can not longer refuse. To hear is for me to obey.”

"I can not let you go!" I cried desperately. "Paul, Paul, I can never let you go."

"It may be years," he said dreamily, brushing away my tears, "it may be many years before I can go, but all the same, I mean one day to make the hope reality. There is only one thing which binds me to home now, and that is my mother. When that tie is broken, then, Aggie, I shall take up the cross, for it has been a cross, and is sometimes now, but I shall carry it. It is a very small thing to do for His dear sake."

"It is not now," I said with a sigh of relief, putting the evil day away. He was not going now. That, to a child of my years, was enough. The present was mine, for my "sure possessing," and I was quite content.

"Let us leave the time to God," he said solemnly; "let us feel that we are in His hand."

"It is a happy thought if one could always feel it so."

"And why may we not? If we look up to God as our Father, and Christ as our Saviour, everything else seems small and of little worth in comparison. Promise me, Aggie, you will help and encourage me?"

"How can I?" I asked. "How can I help

you, when the one wish of my heart is that you may never go? And why did you never tell me all this before?"

"I had to fight the battle out, and understand myself first. It seems hard to leave this beautiful home and friends behind. Now it seems to me that I have no home or friends but the Home I am striving to reach in the Eternal City, and the Friend who is nearer and dearer than all others beside. Do you ever think thus of your home, Aggie?"

"I don't know," I said faintly.

"Try and think of it so. Only feel that it is a short time we have to wait. It matters but little what place we have here, it can never be a home. It can only last until death steps in and takes us from it all. What matter how we live, or where? He had not where to lay His head, and I—why should I linger here idly, and in luxury, when I remember the souls waiting for Christ?"

"Do not talk so, dear Paul," I said. "I do not know you to-night."

"No, I have never shown you all my heart before; but I could not help it to-night. I tell you of it because I feel so clearly I may not be always near you as now, and we must help and encourage each other while we may. Besides, I

want you to accustom yourself to the thought, and then you can not fail to see the path of duty that spreads before me very plainly."

I shook my head.

"You will find enough heathen at home, Paul. You have not to go to Zulu for them. Begin your work on me."

"I have," he said gravely. "I have been a long time striving, very feebly, to plant good seed—seed that perhaps, when I am gone, may spring up and bear good fruit."

I could not keep back my tears at this.

"Why do you cry so, Aggie?" he said softly, and drawing me closer to him.

"I can not help it. It is because I love you, I suppose, and want you with me, and—what shall I do without you?"

"Say as I do, it is a little while on earth to wait, and *eternity is long*, so very long! Let us never be separated there, little one. That is the only parting we need dread—the final parting, through all eternity, of friends, when we at the last shall stand before the Judge. And with that thought ever in our hearts, let us help each other put the world away, and take only Christ. When I think of that it makes me very happy."

And though his eyes were misty with tears as my own were, I could no longer try to dissuade him.

After that our conversation went on to other things, and Paul did not talk of himself much, but his Master more, and I lay back on my pillow, quiet and content now that he was back in his old place as teacher, and was not going away for many days. How could I be other than content when I had him for guide and friend?

And while we were talking, the doctor came in and went directly to Jack's room, and he stayed so long that Paul went away, and I had gone to bed when I heard his footsteps in the hall; and I sat up listening to the sound of the carriage wheels crunching the frozen ground under its light covering of snow, until it died away in the distance, and I sat there listening, with a vague foreboding at my heart, until Jane came in to say that the doctor was coming again about midnight, and that Jack was very ill.

Poor little boy.

CHAPTER XIII.

BEFORE morning little Jack was moaning and tossing with fever, and before the day was ended we knew he would not live. The doctor, from the very first, gave no hope of his recovery.

We heard with terror that it was scarlet fever, and that none of us would be permitted to enter the sick-room, which was hard for poor Ned. He was utterly overcome when he found his brother was really ill; but when he heard the doctor's decision, very carefully and kindly told, but distinct and certain, he seemed beside himself with remorse and grief. He found out then, poor boy, that there was nothing but love in his heart for this brother who was so soon to leave him. My heart ached for Ned.

It had been so natural and easy to bully little Jack and make a fag of him, but he had not meant to be unkind, he said, laying his head in my lap, and sobbing out all his terror and grief

there, in the deserted dining-room, which looked so cold and cheerless now when stripped of the gay Christmas tree and hangings of green.

We scarcely saw Aunt Martha, she was so constant in her attention to the poor little sufferer, but Paul was with us a great deal of the time. He came in at any hour of the day or night, just as he used when we were at the Lee, and he also went up to share Aunt Martha's watch, or speak a few comforting words at times. How eagerly we waited for his return to us, and how we gathered around the fire, speaking in subdued whispers, with a tremulous fear of the darkness and quiet which hung about the house; and how we started at every shadow and slight sound. And then when Paul came down, how we searched his face, and could tell intuitively, without need of words, how the sick child was. And when the third day began to dawn, it became evident to all that for little Jack another and a better dawn was brightening. Jane told us this as we three sat over the dining-room fire that third night of his illness. We could not any of us sleep, and so gathered together to share our anxious watch. We did not dare go to our own rooms past the door of the chamber where Jack lay, and whose restless moan-

ings and cries we could plainly hear, but we sat there until far into the night, holding one another's hands, and speaking very kindly and tenderly; and Jane came backward and forward, opening the doors softly, and telling us in whispers the changes that came and went in the sick-room. We were all very kind to each other; even Phil lowered his voice and stepped so noiselessly that no one would have imagined that it was rough, merry Phil so subdued into quiet and sympathy.

Paul had telegraphed to the boy's grandparents, their nearest relations; but they lived far south, and no answer to his message had been received. Ned had been talking to him about it, and was quietly crying, when the doctor came in that night and stayed a long time. When he came down his face was grave as he took Paul aside, and they held a low conversation together; then without a word to us, the doctor drove away, and Paul went up-stairs. Phil got up, walking to and fro, restlessly and anxiously, and Ned followed Paul, while I was left alone before the fire, with my head full of dull, heavy pain, and the blood bounding strangely hard and hot in my swollen veins.

I had not been well since the party, but no one

noticed or thought of me ; no one but Paul, and he had attributed it to my sleepless nights and anxiety, and had begged me to go to my own room and rest, but I could not, so Jane stayed by me through the nights in the dining-room, and made me a nice little bed of the afghan and sofa-pillows, and was kind and gentle to me as if she had been my mother. Poor Jane had forgotten all my misdemeanors as a child, and the gift of the maroon dress was the seal set to our friendship in the future.

I sat there long before the fire, watching the flickering flame, and thinking, thinking over all that Paul had said to me of death and heaven, and the great hereafter. And then my thoughts went farther back to the time when I first saw him on the sea-shore ; of my own fright, and his jesting words ; and afterward how I came, day by day, to know him so well ; our long talks on the beach, on the deck of the *Scud*, in the sober shade of the wood, with the far-away murmur of the surf filling our ears ; of his love and care of me ; and how he had tried to persuade me into choosing the Friend who was nearer and dearer than any earthly friend. It all came back to me, rolling over my heart like a flood ; all those precious promises of

strength and deliverance to those who trusted in Him.

But I had neglected the teachings, forgotten the counsel, rejected the promises. It was a hard, bitter retrospect to me, and I sat there so lost in thought that I did not know when Phil left the room, and I was alone; and then I started up in fright and opened the door into the hall, listening for some sound from the sick-room. It was very quiet, save for a low sound of weeping, and I went cautiously up the stairs, and found Ned kneeling by Jack's door. I put my arm around him, and we crouched there together listening. Oh, how still it was! Only four days before, the house was full of riotous mirth and laughter, and now it was still as if it were a grave. So fearfully still that we only heard our own hearts beating, and our quick-drawn breaths. My own head, as I leaned it against Ned's, was wild and giddy with pain, but I dared not speak of it. If Jack should die, as the doctor said he would, why might not I? I might even have the same fever about me now. It was very strange my head should ache so, and my hands and face feel so hot and dry; and Paul's words of the summer before flashed through my mind, "Children are dying around us

every day, and why may not you?" and my wicked answer, "I was never in better health in my life." Ah, I could not say that now, with a choking sense of fear lest any one should think me really ill; and then we heard a smothered sound within the room, and Ned started up and we both listened. It was only a feeble voice, hoarse with fever, calling for water, and moaning piteously, and not at all like little Jack's; and then he wanted "brother Ned," and some one tried to soothe and still him. Ned's whole frame shook with suppressed sobs, but when he heard his name he could bear it no longer.

"I must go, Aggie," he said. "They have forbidden me to come in, but I can not hear him calling for me and not answer." And he put out his hand gently, and pushed open the door. Then, as my eyes fell on the bed, I shrunk back in the shadow where they could not see me, but where I could plainly see all within. I had not looked upon his face since he had said, "I should like to kiss you good-night, Aggie, if you would not mind." Poor little Jack! I remembered how hot and burning his lips had felt as they touched mine. Had he kissed me that night unto death? I looked in, struck with this dread fear, and saw the

little white face, which I hardly knew as Jack's, lying on Aunt Martha's breast, as she sat on the bed with both arms around him, holding him up. And Paul, too, was leaning over him, and I saw Ned go in and bend down, kissing forehead and lips, and the two little hands placed in his; and then, without a word, he dropped on his knees by the bed, burying his face in the clothes, yet still holding his brother's hands.

And Jack looked up at Aunt Martha with eyes bright and luminous, and said faintly, "Will he tell me some more? Will he tell it to Ned, too?"

She bent over him, parting the clustering, tangled curls from his forehead, and kissing him, said, "Yes, if he was not tired."

I leaned forward, listening eagerly. Paul had been speaking, and he began again, but in a voice so low I could barely hear what he was saying. The room was very still. Very faint and far away, the noises of the street and city stole up into the room. The day was near breaking, and the milkmen's carts were rattling over the stones, but faint and indistinct these sounds were, and muffled and far away as in a dream.

"Tell me some more," said Jack, still looking

into Paul's face. "Tell me if I too may reach the beautiful city."

"You surely may," answered Paul, softly. "His arms are open to take in all who pray to Him and who love Him."

"I have loved Him all my life; I can not love Him any more now I am going to Him; only—" and the tired eyes roved around longingly—"I want Ned to come too."

Ned's face was buried in the bedclothes, but he sobbed out something which Jack's listening ear caught eagerly. He reached out his hands to draw Ned closer to him, and the little face grew almost beautiful with a strange, unearthly light, which, now that heaven was claiming it, broke over and made it radiant.

"Oh, Ned, kiss me once more;" speaking with the greatest difficulty. "Tell me you will forget if I have been cross sometimes."

"It is I who have been unkind all my life," cried Ned. "You will forgive me, darling? I did not mean it; you must know I never meant it, and yet," breaking down into inarticulate sobbing, "I never did treat you right."

A smile lit up the face of the dying boy.

"But I knew when you hugged me up at night, Neddy, that you loved me all the same. It was so nice to lie in your arms. You'll miss me there, Neddy. Take me in your arms now—hold me so just once more before I say good-bye."

Aunt Martha lifted Jack's head very tenderly from her shoulder, and let Ned slip into her place. Long the two brothers clasped each other—long and close—while Jack, with the same far-away look and heavenly smile, was murmuring incoherently of the story of the cross which Paul had been telling him, and the beautiful city toward which his feet were straying.

"I shall never give up watching until you come, Neddy; I shall be so glad to feel your arms about my neck; hold me close—so."

His head dropped heavily on Ned's shoulder, and the eyes grew heavy and dull. I saw Paul raise his hand to Aunt Martha, and then they both stood quietly looking down upon the still face, while I held my breath and stood looking too, as if I were fastened to the spot. Not a word was spoken. He breathed very hard, in quick, short gasps, and over his face a strange gray shadow was creeping. I watched the eyes grow

heavier and duller. I saw Aunt Martha gently take the little boy from Ned's embrace, and lay the head tenderly back upon the pillow.

"Jack," cried Ned, with a wild, despairing cry; "Jack, darling, don't go and leave me; come back to me; oh, come back to me for a little while!"

He bent over him, kissing him with untold agony in his face, but little Jack no longer heard. The heavy eyes grew fixed, then still; there were three pitiful, faint sighs, as if the frail spirit loved to linger there; then Jack was not with us any longer.

Aunt Martha closed the eyes, now staring wide and blankly; kissed him again and again, then turned to Ned. I could not stay any longer. I crept noiselessly down the carpeted stairs, with a sense of fright and horror in my heart which I could not conquer. I went straight down into the dining-room, where I could be alone. The fire had been neglected, and was going out; the room was quite cheerless and cold, but I sat down before the smouldering ashes, not feeling it at all, for in my veins so bright and fierce a fire was leaping. I felt my pulse and tried to count, but could not, my brain was so wild and giddy. Then I won-

dered if I too were not very ill, and I fell into a long fit of musing over the little one who had gone. I had never seen any one die before. A week ago I had not known this little boy—now I wept and mourned for him as for a brother. But it was not hard to die *that* way, I thought. It was perfect and easy and sweet, just to go up to the Lord, as did little Jack. If I put out my hand and placed it in His, He would not turn away. He would take me, too, in the all-embracing arms, and lift me up just as tenderly. Oh, how fair this Paradise of God looked to me when Paul had painted the gates wide open to let every sin-freed soul pass in; and how I had wandered, how far I had wandered, and how little I had kept the Cross in view. How utterly I had failed in it all. Was it of any use trying? Was it of any, any use?

I sat there alone so long in the hush of the solemn night, and with a brain full of such new, wild, horrible thoughts, that when Aunt Martha came in, the very quiet opening of the door caused me to start up and utter a cry of terror. She came directly over to me, taking my hand in hers.

“I have come to tell you,” she said, “poor little Jack is at rest.”

And when I looked up, her eyes were wet with tears.

"I saw him die," I said hurriedly. "I stood by the door. Oh, aunt, I am so afraid."

"Afraid?" she asked. "Afraid of what, my poor child?" looking in my face earnestly, and touching my cheek with her hand. "Aggie, are you ill too? Tell me, what is it? Why are you afraid?"

"I shall die," I said, bursting into an agony of weeping. "I shall die, auntie, but not like little Jack. I am too wicked. I dare not die now."

"My dear Agatha; my poor, dear child."

She put both arms around me tenderly, and the long, close pressure said as plainly as words could how full her heart was of love and thought of me. She held my head upon her shoulder just as she had held Jack's a few hours before.

"I am afraid I have forgotten other duties," she said, "in my care of this poor little stranger. My child, you are really ill, and I must put you to bed directly."

"I dare not," clinging to her. "I dare not lie there all alone."

"Then I will stay with you. But, Agatha, why do you feel so? Jack went out into the great,

dim future without a thought of fear. He knew he was dying, but he did not dread the darkness of the grave. My child, it is a pleasant, beautiful thing to have death come to us when our souls are ready and waiting for the summons, as was the soul of this little boy."

She looked earnestly at me with almost a smile on her face, as if she had not just come away from this scene of death which had affected me so differently.

"It was beautiful and sweet," she said, "to be permitted to witness such a sight—a little ransomed soul starting out joyfully to meet its Saviour; a freed spirit going down into the dark valley, not feeling the darkness, and only keeping the light beyond in view."

Oh, why should I fear? Why should I tremble and turn away in affright when the same Hand was ever extended, the same Light shining through all the darkness?

And just then Paul came in with Ned, who had been weeping bitterly, but to whom he must have been saying comforting things, for there was a look of quiet endurance on his face which I had not expected to see. Paul walked up and down the room, and Ned went over to my old place, the

sofa, covering his eyes with his hands. Day was just breaking, and the cold, wan light was creeping into the room where we four were gathered so silently, and with such strange awe and sorrow in our hearts. Paul was the first to break the silence, as he paused in his walk to draw aside the curtain.

"What a happy dawning for little Jack," he said. "What a long, long day, after the night!" speaking rather to himself than to us.

Then he came over to Ned's side, taking his hand in his.

"You would not wish him back," he said gently, "if you could see all the glory and beauty of this new day which has dawned for your brother in Paradise. Oh, if you only knew, like him, all the sweet meaning of the words which were such a stay and strength to his soul—'A hope in Christ.' One can not grieve or be sad any more when one has such an anchor, sure and steadfast, to which he may always cling."

And then he said softly, "Let us pray."

How still and solemn the room was, broken only by Ned's sobs and the low words of prayer. I had heard it often before, carelessly enough it is true, but his words bore a new meaning to me as I listened in awe and grief, following Paul in my

heart as he besought for us all that blessing which the well-beloved Son shall pronounce to those who love and fear Him. "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

When he had ended we were all quietly crying, and when he came and kissed me good-bye, I clung to him, sobbing brokenly :

"Will I ever be worthy to receive that blessing, Paul? Oh, will I ever be worthy?"

"It is not our being *worthy*," he said. "It is our being *unworthy*, and feeling it so. If you love Christ supremely, and desire Him above all else; if you know yourself to be a sinner in His sight, and feel deeply your own unworthiness, then you may indeed feel sure He will accept you, and that you are His child. And you do love Him now, don't you, Aggie?"

"Sometimes," I said. "Sometimes I think I do above all else; but I am afraid to-night, I am afraid to die and meet Him."

"He will take away your fear. He will give you the same strength and peace which was given to this little boy who has left us. Only give Him all your heart. Remember the precious words, the gracious promises."

He kept his arm about me, holding me closely to him for some time.

"You will make yourself ill," he whispered, "if you are not that already," putting his cold fingers on my forehead, which was hot and burning, and touching my pulse. "Miss Martha," calling her to him, "here is more work for you. I am afraid Aggie will be ill."

"I have neglected her too long, I know," she answered. "She must go to my room now, and I shall take care of her, and she will feel better in a few days, I trust. It has been a great shock to her, as to us all, and a sad ending of our pleasant Christmas. Poor little Agatha!" kissing my cheek.

And then Paul carried me very tenderly into her own pretty room, and laid me upon the bed, saying kindly and gravely, "Good-bye," and promising to come in again that morning. And aunt undressed me, and bathed my throbbing head with cool water, and talked to me soothingly and quietly, and finally read me to sleep with the beautiful hymns out of the book that Jack had given to her. It was pleasant and comforting to hear them, and I fell asleep with the words on my lips, and filling my heart with a strange new feeling of almost peace.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHEN I awoke it was broad day. The sunlight lay all over the floor in a flood of brightness, and the little canary hanging in the window was stirring, and shaking his feathers, and trying a soft note or two, as if the sunshine were just as pleasant to him as to me. Except for the little bird the house was unnaturally still. I raised my head from the pillow, and, leaning on one elbow, looked around, wondering why I was there, and then suddenly I remembered the night before. Just over me little Jack lay dead, and I was here in Aunt Martha's room. I remembered it all. I sat up in bed listening to Cherry, and watching the pleasant sunshine creep around and stream through the window, broader and fuller, and dance upon the floor. Auntie's room was very cheerful with its one large window, just like that in the dining-room, with the gilded cage hanging in it, and some flowers in a bracket and on a stand, and a little soft

coal fire dancing upon the hearth—yes, it was very cheerful here, but up-stairs it was dim and cold, and Jack lay there dead! I shuddered at the thought, and all the warmth and brightness of that pleasant morning seemed suddenly to flee away, and leave me in the cold and dark, as he was lying. And then my head ached, and I thought if Paul would only come in and talk to me; if he only would come; he had promised me he would; and I wondered what o'clock it could be, and tried to raise my head and look at the little timepiece on the mantel, and could not, for I was so giddy; so I laid down again, with the old throbbing of the day before come back over my temples; and when Aunt Martha came in a few minutes after, I was just fit to burst into tears again with the fear that I must be very ill. And the effort of sitting up had made my head ache worse than ever, and I was glad, and frightened too, when she said the doctor was coming in to see me—he was in the house even then.

I did not leave this bed, or Aunt Martha's sunshiny little room, for nearly two weeks after this; for fever set in, and from stupid, apathetic suffering, I passed for a time into utter unconsciousness. I must have been very ill, for I remember so little

about it, and I saw so many strange sights, and wandered so far and wide, that I was exhausted and worn out in but trying to remember when and how it had all happened. Sometimes I woke to know Aunt Martha's voice, to see her face bending over me, to feel her cool hands in mine; and then the darkness, like a great wave, would roll suddenly over me, and blot it all out. Those great waves—tumbling and tossing, white-capped and angry—how they flashed out of the great black inane floating around me!—how they shrieked and moaned, and tossed before my eyes, and then swept down, quiet, dumb, glassy, motionless, until my brain grew wild and weary of the horrible calm. Oh! I saw strange sights, and had many a wild dream, while I lay there hovering between life and death; and through it all I felt a great want, sleeping or waking, in delirium or in moments of reason.

I knew Paul was away from me. Not once did I feel the cool touch of the hand on mine which was such a check, such an encouragement to me. And this was strange, for when I was better, and able to talk, and knew every one again, Aunt Martha told me Paul had watched by my bedside almost all of the time until after New Year, and

he was obliged to go back to the Seminary then. It was strange that I did not remember anything about it. Those two weeks were almost a perfect blank to me. I remembered nothing of the time when little Jack was taken away, or when Phil and Ned went back to school. And when I came to myself, and saw the same sunshine streaming in through the half-drawn curtains, and the flowers in the window, and the little fire crackling on the hearth, it seemed to me that but for an unusual sense of weakness, I had only slept an hour or two, and that Jack still lay in the cold room up-stairs, as he lay that first day Paul carried me into aunt's room. But Cherry was gone, and when I asked Jane why he was taken away, she told me I had been very ill, and the bird's singing sometimes disturbed me. Poor little Cherry; I made Jane go and bring him in from the dining-room, and hang him in the sunlight again, and I watched him hop about from perch to perch, softly trilling and chirping, and thought it was a very fine thing for even a little bird to have a home, and know it, and be glad to get back to it again. And then I would sleep very quietly through a great part of the day, waking to know that aunt or Jane was by me, or I would watch the fire, and dream after my old

fashion, seeing so many curious and wonderful things in the leaping flame, and falling off to sleep, and dreaming other and more wonderful dreams. And then there came times when the nights were long and lonely, and I would wake and watch the glimmer of the taper on the dressing-table, feeling so weak and weary, but lying very quietly, thinking with a throbbing brain, "What if I were to die"—what if I were to die, and my soul were lost forever? And then I tried to pray as Paul had taught me, and I always felt comforted after it. Very feeble and weak they were; but nearer and nearer, each day, by these prayers, I drew to the dear Lord, and clearer the light shone, and the darkness was slowly fleeing away. But it was weary work to struggle back to life, and sometimes I felt a great apathy concerning it. I had at first so dreaded to die; but as the days went by, and I felt more plainly the clasp of the hand which I knew was always stretched out to guide and save, I began to look upon it as not so hard a thing to leave the world, if only one could be sure of the life "hidden with Christ, in God." And I thought of Jack no longer with shuddering fear. It was such a peaceful falling on sleep, how could I rebel? It seemed so easy and beautiful just to give

oneself up to God as he did. Ah! why might not I? Thus I used to lie and think sometimes in the quiet watches of the night, until at last a deep sense of happiness and rest would fill my heart whenever I thought upon these things, and yet I could scarcely tell why I was happy—I only knew I was so.

It seemed to me a long, long time before I threw off this state of quiet, happy convalescence, and began to walk feebly around Aunt Martha's pleasant little bedroom, and play at being well again. And yet in all it was only four weeks. It seemed to me scarcely possible. It was very nice at first to feel rid of pain and fever, and aching limbs, and to lie quietly on the bed in a loose warm wrapper, and watch the sunshine creeping around, brightening up everything in the pretty little room. It was so good of Aunt Martha to give it up to me. She slept on a lounge, by my bedside, through the nights while I was so very ill, with only Jane to relieve her, after Paul had gone away. How kind and good everybody had been; and then, Aunt Martha—I wondered sometimes how I could ever have been ungrateful enough to dislike and annoy her, as I knew I had done, many and many a time. She looked pale and worn, I noticed

when I began to sit up, and I longed to be well that she might have the rest she so much needed. But I found it very hard work to get back into the old strength again, and I grew very weary finally of the cosy little chamber, and longed to be around the house, and in my own room once more.

One day when auntie had bought a new book, and sat by my bedside a long time to read it to me, I could not help but say—seeing the kind eyes of Paul back of everything else, and filling me with a great longing to see him again; I could not help but say—

“Aunt, I must see Paul. There are so many things I want to see him for; can I?”

“Paul has gone back to the Seminary,” she answered. “He could not come to you now, my child.”

“Not if I were dying, aunt? He surely could come then.”

“But you are not dying, my dear; you are getting well very fast now,” kindly patting my hand.

“If I only could see him for a moment,” I said.

“Oh, auntie, I need him so much now.”

“Why do you want to see him so much?” she asked with tender interest in her face. “Will no one else do as well?”

I did not answer. I turned to the wall, and covering my face with my hands, I tried to separate myself from all other thoughts, and look into my heart. Could it be I was deceiving myself with a false hope? It had become almost second nature to tell my every thought to this friend, who was dear as an own brother to me; whose advice I asked for, and whose love I craved above all other in the world. Surely he, and only he, could tell me if I were on the right path. I needed Paul that day, oh, how much I needed him. I tried to look into my heart and see what it was that was filling it, but all was dimness and confusion; and I lay there struggling with doubts and fears; and the room was very still, and Aunt Martha went on reading very quietly to herself. And still I lay there, my face buried in the pillow, and all my soul going out into wild, dumb questioning, until suddenly the cloud began to lift and roll away, just as the mist, lying down closely in the valley, flees away when the sun bursts through. How they scatter, how they part, how they melt away! My heart stood still for a moment, drinking in all the warmth and brightness of this sudden rift of sunshine—stood still, and then in that first thrill of conscious happiness, knew itself.

"Do you think it is wrong to want to live, auntie?" I began, tremulously.

"Wrong? No, my love. God means us to be happy. Our life is a gift from His hands. He only asks that we spend it in His service."

"Some days I have felt almost as if I wanted to die," I said in a low voice, "if only I could die and feel as Jack did. It seems so easy to die *that* way."

"It is easy," taking my hand in hers—and never had her face looked more beautiful or placid, as she smiled down upon me with her eyes full of gathering tears; "so easy, my little child, if you only give yourself to God as he did, and lie content in His arms, feeling always 'It is the Lord.'"

"But to-day I want to live, auntie," I said, eagerly. "I want to get well, and feel strong and full of health, as I used. Is it wrong?"

"No," still smiling down at me, with misty eyes; "I want to see you well too. But you must not forget it is a second gift of life to you, from the same kind Father. You must not forget when you are well, all the love and tender compassion He has shown to you."

"I hope," I said slowly, with the light all the

time shining stronger and fuller, and the touch of happiness still thrilling my heart—"I hope, sometimes in fear and trembling, and I can not keep from feeling glad and happy when I think of the promise, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and *thou shalt be saved*.' Is simple belief all, auntie? If that is *all*, why have I not been happy before, for I have always *believed* in Him?"

"But if you believe in Him, then surely you must have loved Him, my child. You could not have turned away from Him coldly all your life who had loved you from the beginning with an everlasting love."

"I believe in Him now," I said slowly, "and I love Him now—I can not begin to tell you how much. I only know now that I never could have loved or believed in Him before."

And Aunt Martha said, "Thank God! thank God!" smiling through fast-falling tears, and gathering me to her heart in a long embrace.

And so the last cloud was lifted and swept away from my soul, and I saw the Cross of Christ shining for me so clearly, just as it had always shone for me, only I had shut my eyes willfully, and for so long a time, to the sight.

After that day it seemed an easy matter to get

well. Life was something worth striving for, now that heaven was so plain and clear to view. A life spent in His service. Ah! how much there was to do; and how short a time to do it in! I had indeed work before me—work while it was called to-day.

CHAPTER XV.

FOUR years had gone by. Spring and summer, autumn and winter. How rapidly they came and vanished, and left us, as the seasons passed into years, an unbroken circle. When the warm, summer days came, we all went down to the pleasant home which I had learned to love so very much, the old, quiet farm by the side of the sounding sea. Phil, too, was with us, now grown into a tall, manly youth, dear as ever to Aunt Martha's heart, and with him sometimes came his friend Ned Carter, who, after Jack's death, seemed to claim Phil, and look upon him almost in the light of a brother. We were all very happy at such times. And our good aunt, placid, smiling, and beaming all over with quiet pleasure, helped us in all our plans, and entered into our little pleasures just as she used when we were children, four years gone by. She still had her small, languid, lady-like employments, her embroideries and bead-work,

her quiet charities, her deportment (and sometimes ours), to busy herself with. And Jane, following closely in her steps, was still "Miss Martha" on an humbler scale, still followed us wherever we went, to city or country. Jane had become a "permanency," and a "peculiar institution," as Phil declared. Poor old Jane! Time had not visited her as lightly as it had the rest of us. Jane was growing old. And then, too, Paul was seldom away from us; and it seemed almost like that first happy summer when I went down to Hilton Lee, and wandered with him hand in hand, all over the dim old woods, sailing away along the shores, and

"Dropping down from the beautiful bay,
Over the sea-slope vast and gray!"

Four years! and it seemed only as many months! Now Paul had ended with Seminary, and I with school, and he was preparing to set out upon the battle of life in earnest. The winter before, his mother had died. He had taken her far south, thinking a warm, soft air would possibly lengthen her days; but it was of no avail. He wrote me of her beautiful, peaceful death, so calm and sweet that it seemed to him only like sleep—the sleep He giveth to His beloved; and then he had

spoken very solemnly of the great work which lay before him, and which for so many years had filled his heart—of his mother's blessing upon it, and her dying wishes concerning it. He had written me every thought of his heart in the hour of his bereavement, with her dying counsel still sounding in his ears; and he had asked for my "God speed" upon his mission. Oh! it was very hard to give that. Many and many a letter passed between us on this subject—mine full of objections, doubts, hindrances; his strong, fixed, full of purpose, overcoming all the barriers which I built up before him, melting them away like mere nothings, until at length I could not ask him to stay. I could not throw my earthly love into the scale, and turn him from his course; and long before he came down to the Lee, I had made up my mind that it was only right and just that he should spend the life and wealth God had given him, in His service. But how I should miss the steady counsel, the support of his strong faith. How my own little rushlight burned small and dim when I thought over all he was giving up, and how little I had done; I who for four years had professed the same love for the Christ we had both dedicated ourselves to serve. I thought of it tearfully,

prayerfully, for the love of ease and luxury, still, alas! was mine. I could and did give of my abundance to the cause of the Master, but Paul gave his all. His beautiful home, where he was born, and which I knew he loved as dearly as I did mine, was sold into the hands of strangers. Not a single thing had he kept. Even the little *Scud*, his boyish pride, and my delight, had been given up two years before. His life, instead of the happy life of indulgence he once lived, became simple, almost monkish in its rigorous self-denial. He was becoming poor for His sake who was once poor for ours; and still, though I loved the same Master, and tried to walk in His footsteps, still I clung to all the dear comforts of my beautiful home. I reproached myself for it daily, and with many prayers, and in much perplexity, I resolved to give Paul, when he left us, a portion of my long-coveted inheritance, to help him in his great work over the sea. When he should come and see me for the last time, I would tell him all. And how I longed, and yet delayed giving to the cause to which he had dedicated his life. For the last time! It seemed strange that I could say it and think of it so calmly; and when the day came around and Phil drove to the depot to meet him,

I felt it was almost heartless of me to care so little about his leaving us forever. And yet how much I did care. When he drove up to the gate, and I ran out to welcome him, how the years fled away; and I seemed again a child, needing him, needing him so very much. I had not met him since his mother's death, nearly eight months before. He had grown paler and thinner, I noted in the first glance; but his old, beautiful, loving smile was just the same, as taking my hands in his, he bent over me, giving me the greeting which I had claimed and received ever since our first summer together by the sea.

"Little Agatha!" he said, caressingly, turning my face up to his, and searching it closely as we lingered by the gate, "the very same little Agatha! Time deals more harshly with me than with you, little one. You look just the same nixie who read Rollin years ago on this old wall, and you are here at the gate where I left you last year—waiting for me all this time? Was I long coming?"

"So long," I answered, "that it does indeed seem like last year since I began watching for you. I thought Phil would never come; oh, how I have longed for you!"

"And it does me good to see you again," his

hand closing over mine. "The days have been long since we parted."

"And you have seen so much sorrow," I said, "dear Paul, in those eight weary months."

"Not sorrow, Agatha; it seems wrong to call it that when to my mother, death only came as a blessing and a release—the crowning joy of a worthily spent life. But I have felt alone since then. Somehow all the brightness and daylight have gone out of my life; it is not darkness, dear love, it is only a shadow that has fallen over my heart—the quiet, sober twilight that comes to us all with the falling years. Don't think I grieve, don't think I am unhappy."

"No," I sighed half sadly, "you can never be unhappy, Paul; but you must grow older and graver and wiser, I suppose;" and looking closely at him I saw the lines already, the shadow he had spoken of, hovering about his face. Somewhat paler and thinner he was, and in the blue, tender eyes a wistful, searching, almost weary look, had grown; but the same Paul for all that. If the brow had an added shade of thoughtfulness, or the mouth a more compressed firmness, the severing of that last and dearest tie which bound him to earth, would sufficiently account for that. I

wanted to ask him so many questions; I longed to have him tell me all his heart; but although many questions rose to my lips, I asked him only one, "You are really going, Paul? You have not changed your mind?"

He looked up suddenly, the old bright smile breaking over his face like summer sunshine.

"Turn back now? Little one, life would be nothing to me now if I were not to give it up to God, wholly and entirely, and in just this way. Why, Agatha, I must leave Hilton Lee to-morrow."

"To-morrow?" I faltered. "To-morrow?—and is this one only day all you can spare to home and to me?"

"It is not home now, not home any longer," turning away from the old house which showed its clustering chimneys and pointed roof plainly through the parted trees. "I put that all away once. I can not bring it back now. I have one home, child—the Home where we shall all meet at the last, I trust. There is nothing clear or permanent for me any longer but that."

We still stood at the gate. June roses clambered all about and hung their wealth of snowy fragrance around the trellis and over our heads. He reached

out his hand and broke off a cluster of them, twining them in my hair as he used to do with the wild flowers and leaves of the wood, where we wandered together in the years that were gone.

"Child, how you have grown," he said; "you are not the little nixie any longer that I thought you. Yes, you have changed too; and I did not dream it; I did not dream it. But you are no longer a child."

"No, I am almost up to your shoulder now, Paul, though you used to defy me ever to get there. I feel I am growing to be a woman, fast; but when I look back upon the past four years, the years that I intended should be so purposeful and good, I am willing to confess I am more of a child than when I made those resolutions—so futile, so aimless, so little of worth is there in anything which I have done. No, do not interrupt me. I know what you would say. Oh, Paul, must my life always be this failure?"

"As all lives are, as all must be—and it is well. Outside of all these struggles, beyond all this failure, lies Heaven and perfection—the crown of life, the song of rejoicing, and none of it ever to pass away. We might love earth too well, and cling to it too fondly, if we had only successes and

pleasures here. Our very failures perhaps may in the end prove our surest success, if, knowing and feeling them, we strive to conquer sin, and to overcome the snares which are laid for our soul, and into which we will surely be led if we do not carry with us continually the remembrance of that Friend above all friends, our Saviour, our Guide. This is the thought which will console you, Aggie, for the unfruitful years you have left behind. For He knoweth our frame, He remembereth we are but dust."

"Oh, Paul, there is so much I need to be directed in, and you are the only one to tell me."

"The only one?"—meeting my eyes with a look of kindly scrutiny. And then we went in to Aunt Martha, and for that one evening, the last of Paul's evenings among old friends and home, we were again the same unbroken circle of four, united in purpose and heavenly longing. And we sat together until far in the night, I clinging closely to his side, scarcely knowing if his presence made me happy or sorrowful, scarcely believing it real that the dream of his life was so near its fulfillment.

CHAPTER XVI.

PAUL was going away that night ! This was the thought which came to me with the dawn, and rested in my heart all through the long summer day, yet it brought no pain or regret. Down deep in my heart lay a little tremulous touch of happiness which I dared not stop to analyze, and could not, even had I dared. I only thought what could I give?—what could I do? Not for Paul, but for this Master whose will he was trying to make his own ; remembering how for so many weeks I had been turning my plans over in my heart ; at first bitterly, not willingly, knowing I was selfish, and cold in my love ; and fighting the tempter when he whispered enticingly to me ; and finally triumphing—for I did triumph !

That night Paul would be going away, I said. He had asked me to meet him once more at the old place on the sands, and I tied on my hat as the sun was going down, and wandered along the

familiar foot-path while all the quiet landscape around lay asleep in the golden haze of a perfect-ending day. Down to the rocks I walked, gathering up sweet old remembrances with every step. I had come here a child, willful, passionate, neglectful of my duties. Here had I been guided and led to the foot of the Cross; here had my hand been taught to clasp the rod and staff that had become my strength and stay; safe through the shadows had I been directed out into the light. He was waiting on the sands for me. I saw him long before I reached the beach, where the summer sea lay rocking gently and breaking in short, crisp waves at his feet, tossing up tangled weed and sea-shells, just as it used when as a child I sat on the great black rock with Paul. Only a few years, and yet it seemed as if all my life had been spent with him, so little had I begun truly to live until I had known him. Day by day, month after month, until I began to count them off as years—and now he was putting all these things away forever, and I could not make my heart sad at the thought, so perfect was the life toward which his steps were leading me. He sat upon the rock, waiting there for me, but he did not look up as I came softly forward and sat down by his side. The

sun was losing itself in gorgeous clouds, and the rose-tinted temple which Paul and I had watched nearly five years before, from the deck of the little *Scud*, was shining for us again, tower and turret, and banner flung wide, and the pearly gates just ajar, and all the golden glory shining through. But Paul did not see it this time, nor the glorious path shining over the seas, which he saw then—neither temple, nor sea, nor sky. His face was buried in his hands, and he did not look up until I spoke.

“What troubles you, Paul?” I asked softly.

Then he turned and looked at me. Surely no trouble or doubt could linger in his heart, who bore so plainly upon his brow the sign of peace? And in the eyes, far away, tender and thoughtful, I could plainly read that the world to which he had bidden farewell, could never charm or beguile him any more.

He put out his arm and drew me to him. “Nothing troubles me now,” he said. “There was only one cloud hanging heavy and dark, but under it all I can see the sun still shining. It is hard to go away from country and friends, and yet not hard either, to leave it all for love of the dear Lord, who is urging me on.”

“Paul,” I interrupted, “I want to give you something—something which I beg of you to take not only because I love you, but because I love this same Master, and have taken Him for my friend too. You will not refuse me?”

“No, I will not refuse you,” he answered, “I will never refuse you anything asked in His dear name.”

“When I was a little child,” I began in a low voice, “I used to love to dream of the future, of the wealth which time and fate would bring to me. I knew I would be rich. I had heard it when I was in the nursery. I used at first to long for the money, that I might have more dolls than auntie gave me. When I grew older the desire for riches grew stronger as the objects which I coveted grew larger, until I began to think it a very grand and desirable thing that death should come and thus give me the inheritance I so much coveted. By and by the dream became reality, and, oh, Paul, you know, you can tell how weak, how full of pride and boastfulness it made me. How I gloried in my riches and reveled in anticipations of the luxury I should call mine. You taught me first, dear Paul, the empty worth of all these things, of how little value they were in the Saviour’s sight.

You gave me my first longing to be good; you were my impulse, my thought, my only thought. You remember when I had been trying all winter to be good for 'Paul's sake,' how you bade me change it for another, and after a time a dearer name? "

He said "yes," with eyes still far away, looking out toward the blue sky and sea melting into one, and against which I could just discern a tiny cloud of thin smoke floating seaward. I watched it, too. Would I sit here and watch the white sails come and go to-morrow? Would I watch and wait again for the *Esperanza* to come floating over the waves to little Agatha Lee? I choked back the sob that struggled up into my voice, and went on:

"You have parted with everything that in the years that have gone have been ties to you, and now you must take part of this wealth I once so weakly coveted." And then as he did not speak I went on more hurriedly, and with something of my old impetuosity: "If I have one good or perfect thought in my heart; if I have given up caring for the world and its enticements; if I long for heaven more day after day, and if I finally reach a home there at last, I must thank you for

teaching me the way, Paul. It is you who led me first to the foot of the Cross, and now my inheritance is worthless in my sight unless I spend it in His service. You will take it, won't you, Paul, to help you on in your great work over the sea?"

"I will take it," he said, "a gift from your hands, little one. We will give up our all, but it must be together. You and I must not part. Do you understand me? Long ago you promised you would take the same path leading up to the wicket; see, it shines for us to-night just as it did then—straight over the seas—and the waves are singing the same old song; stop, child, and listen; 'Come over and help us,' they say to me; why not to you?"

I said nothing while his eyes rested on me. I only looked out at the far horizon, and the thin line of feathery smoke skimming against the dead, dark blue, and was silent. He took my face in his hands, and held it up to him.

"I have given up all but this," he said, "and I can not put seas between it and me. Never to see your young face—the little face I have learned to study, and love so dearly in studying—never to take your hand in mine again, or hear your voice," and his own was unsteady, "and you have given

me of your wealth, while I, oh, Agatha, I have nothing left to give you but myself."

I did not move. I sat looking at him with eyes that were misty, though I did not know it, with happy tears. Then I suddenly put out my arms with a cry in my heart which I could not stifle any longer.

"Now tell me," he said, but I had no words to answer him. I could urge my cause impetuously and earnestly in bestowing my wealth, but this, the crowning happiness of my life, sealed my lips. My joy had made me dumb!

.
And so we are going away—Paul and I—going away together, and forever. Forever? Such a full, sad word, and yet it brings no sadness to me. It is only a little sorrow at parting; a little pang, but before us ever the bliss of meeting again; a little toil and struggling here, to be made up in the Hereafter by perfect joy and rest and peace. Paul says he has not an unfulfilled desire left him in life now, and have I? I can not tell; I do not know; I only feel that he will be near me just as of old—my guide, my counselor, his people to be my people, and his God to be my God—and so the days fall softly upon our great content. For

life is short and eternity is long, and we go while it is called "to-day ;" while the Lord is calling for us to put in the sickle and glean, while the field is white unto the harvest. It is He who is helping us to go bravely, strong in His strength. And still the same light shines for us across the seas, and leads us on—on. God grant it may never flicker or fade, or that we forget to keep it in view ! God grant that His Spirit may go up with us, until finally we claim that which is far more perfect and enduring than aught which earth can give—our true Inheritance at the last.

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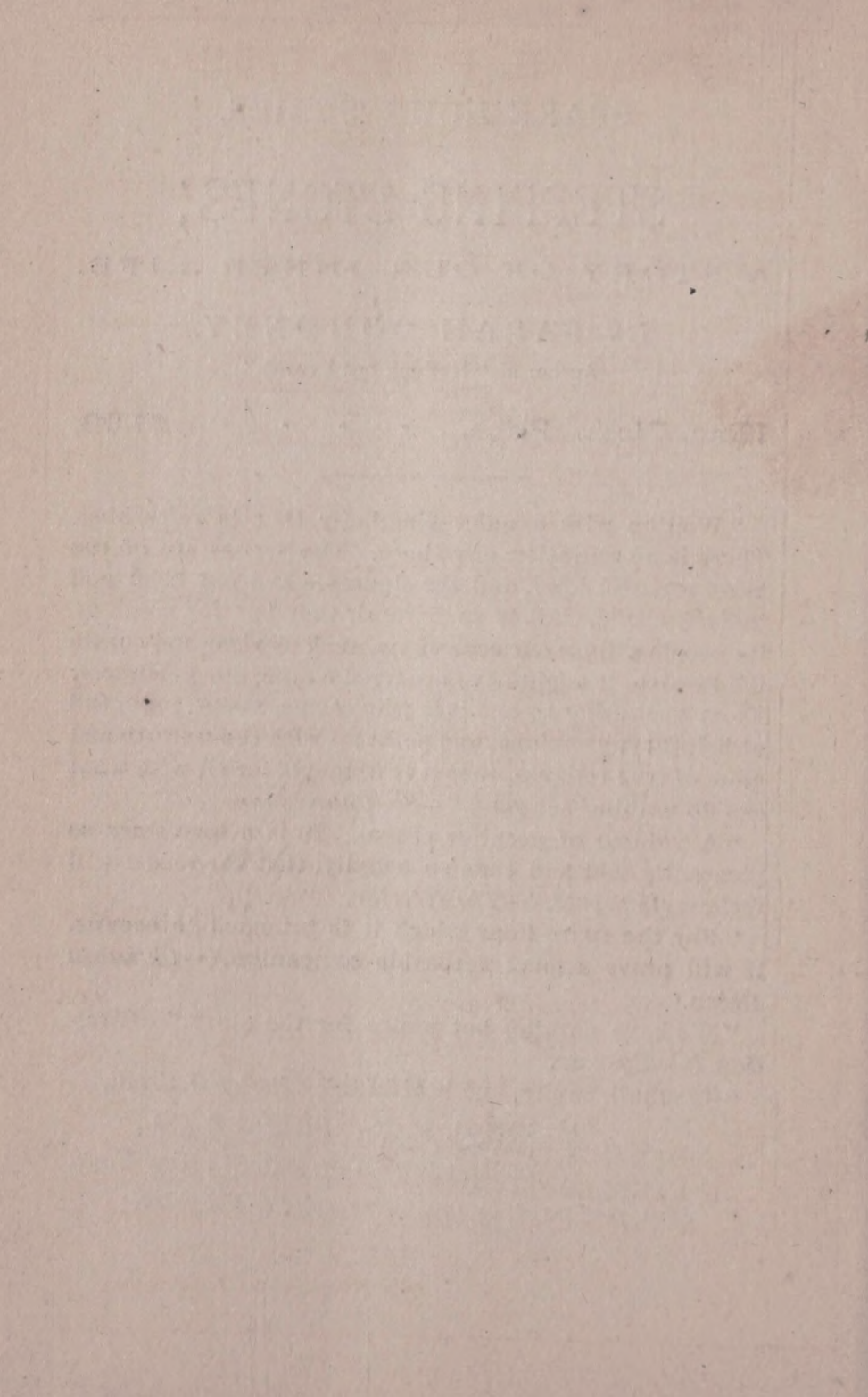
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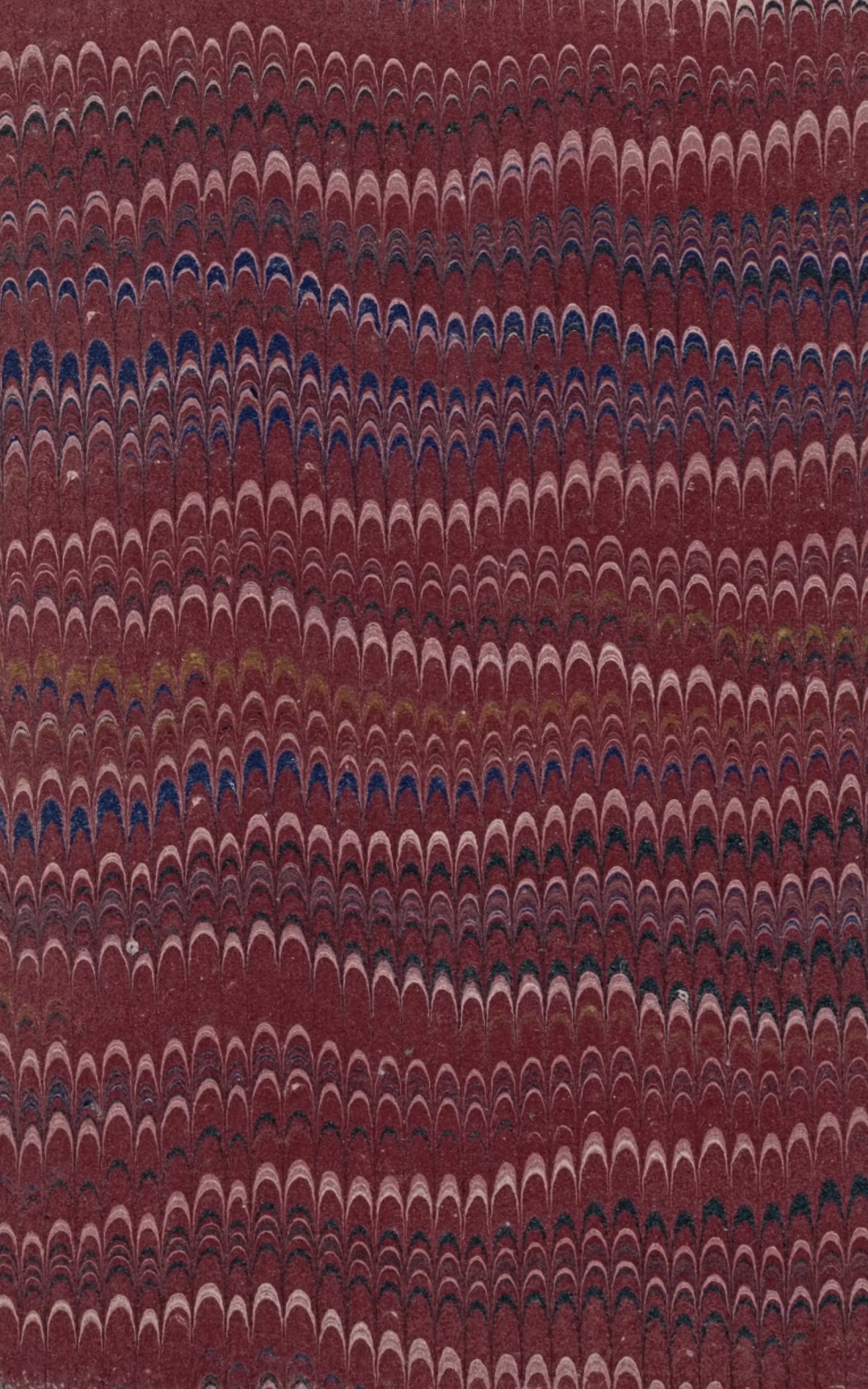
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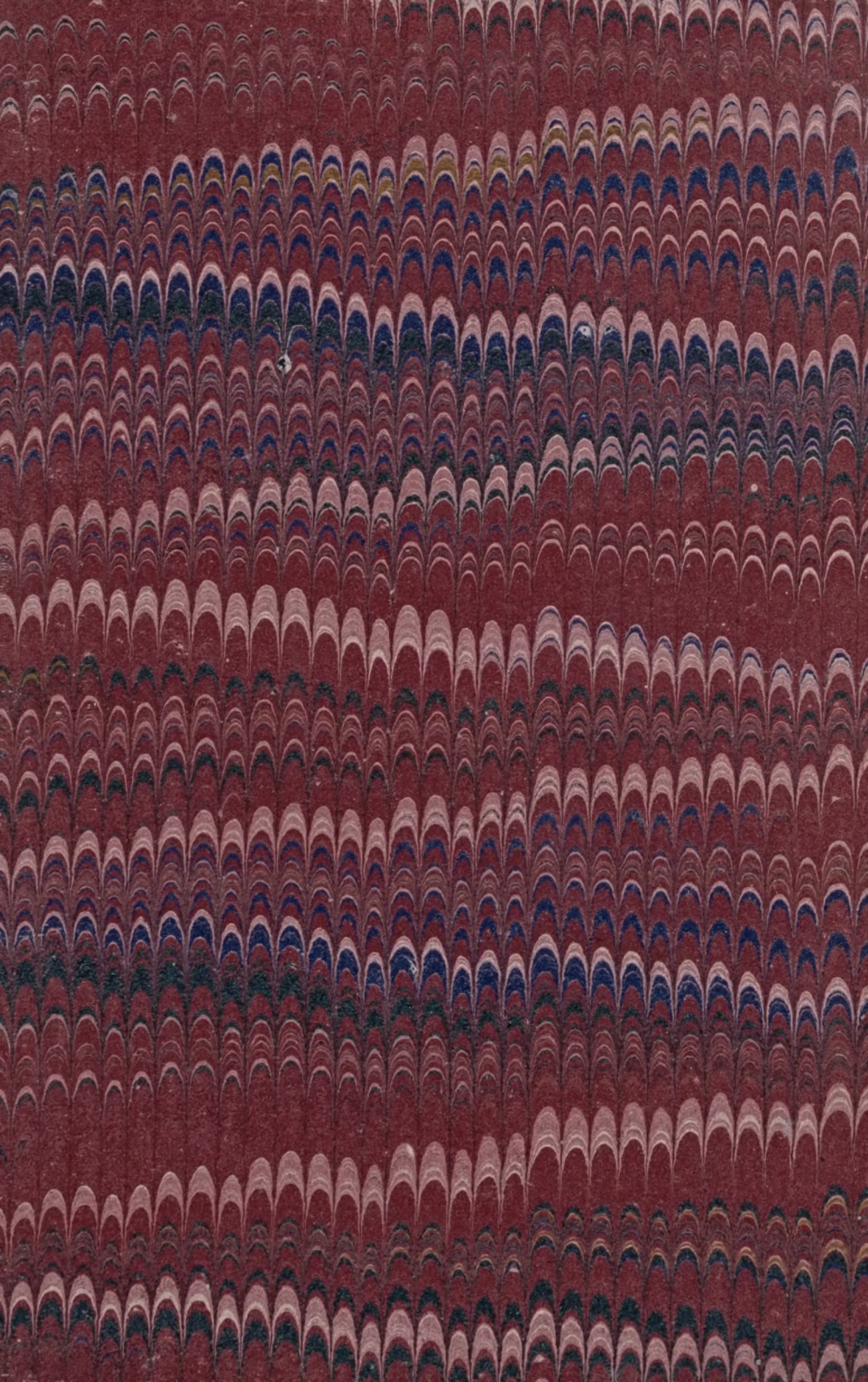
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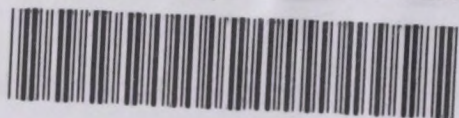
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